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*GODWYN'S ORDEAL*



*MRS JOHN KENT SPENDER*





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GODWYN'S ORDEAL.

—  
VOL. III.



# GODWYN'S ORDEAL

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

"BOTH IN THE WRONG," "MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE,"

"PARTED LIVES," "JOCELYN'S MISTAKE,"

"HER OWN FAULT," &c., &c.

"She, not only through her wit,  
Coud all the feat of wifely homeliness,  
But eke, when that the case requiréd it  
The common profit coudè she redress ;  
There nas discórd, rancour, nor heaviness,  
In all that land that she ne coud appease,  
And wisely bring them all in rest and ease.

O! needless was she tempted in assay!  
But wedded men ne knowen no mesure  
Whan that they find a patient creature."

CHAUCER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. III.



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## GODWYN'S ORDEAL.

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### CHAPTER I.

IT is hard to live up to our own eloquence when the test is put to us, and so Godwyn found it when she came to the prose and not to the poetry.

She had fared too sumptuously at first to be able to eat the plain food of the commonest every-day experience. It was a shock to her to be brought in contact with her father, who had slidden by slow degrees down the descending ladder.

Deprived of his pension, and unable to support himself in ill-health, she found him lying in bed in miserable London lodgings, with the pervading smell of garlic and onion from the other rooms in the house, with the dirt swept into corners, and the torso of a jug, spoutless and handleless, doing duty in his carpetless room. To make things worse, as the lodgings were near the river, and as he occupied an apartment on the ground floor, there was an insidious damp pervading everything with great patches, like furry mould on the paper of the walls.

"We must get him out of this, at all costs," was her first idea; and then her next how to turn her musical gift to practical advantage.

For the first time she had to learn how, in musical education, the supply was

greatly in excess of the demand, and how her services would be disdainfully paid for by a critical and detracting public, and she was fain to eke out her scanty earnings by fancy lace-work for a milliner's shop with fingers too often numbed by the cold.

Her father's state of health had proved so weak that he was unable to stand the shock of the excitement caused by his daughter's return to him. And when the colder part of the winter set in, it was evident that the cruellest storms of that life which had been a continual warfare for him were to be ended at last. Life had been a hard riddle for the man who had made such early mistakes in it—an unreadable scroll.

"Surely," thought Godwyn, "death would lift the curtains and give him a

glimpse of the light which lately he had seemed to crave." For the last time he had borne the brunt of evil tongues; there could be no more vexing questions, no more miserable memories.

"All the millions of the dead have got through it before. To object to die is to object to being human," he said one day to his daughter, who reminded herself how Schiller had once talked like that, and reasoned that "death was no evil because it was universal."

"And yet somehow all that seems to make no difference when one has to go through it oneself," muttered the broken-down man.

She answered, when there was a slight pause in the traffic of the streets,

"It *can* make no difference if the Lord of Life is with us." And then she found

courage to continue—"It is only when we feel that He has warmed the grave for us that we can have the courage to lie down in it."

Till that moment he had seen the darkness and had seen nothing beyond it, but now real forgiveness in its highest Christlike sense, as another name for Love, came to him in the presence of his daughter. Now that he believed in Godwyn's love, it seemed to him that he could realise a higher forgiveness.

It was so wonderful to have this child, whom he had neglected in his lifetime, so tenderly devoted to him at last, whispering in his dull ear, "I know that my Redeemer liveth?" and trying—when she could no longer repeat the words of hope with any confidence that he heard

them—to write a paper “God is Love” laying it on his clammy hands till the film of death over-spread his eyes, and the messenger that would not be denied had separated them.

When her father was taken from her, all Godwyn's energy seemed to forsake her. Till then she had not lost her singleness of heart and oneness of purpose, but now her memory was for ever flitting back to the happier recollections of her once-luxurious home. All desire for fame, all success seemed as nothing to her now; the few patrons she had gained grew indignant with her for her indifference.

“Oh, the pity of it!” she thought, as she looked back upon the story of her father's life. It would have been better if he had died when I was a little child!

If I had only known my father as he was when my mother met him!"

And then she would blame herself for her morbid reflections, wondering if the shame which had now assumed such gigantic proportions would ever lapse into the shade of forgotten things, and longing for what seemed the far-off, faint possibility of forgetting it.

On the day when, after some difficulty, Humphrey succeeded in tracing her to her lodgings—springing impatiently up the narrow stairs three steps at a time—and when, as soon as she heard the knock of a stranger at the door of her room, she retreated to the farthest window and stooped low over her needlework—nothing could be further from her thoughts than that he was in England, still less that he should leave Dornton during the



present emergency to seek her out in her retirement and to tempt her to return with him.

His touch was on the handle of the door while she was still hesitating how to answer the knock, and she doubted whether she was in her sound wits—her sick heart giving one bound—as she heard her name pronounced in his well-known voice. Could it be he himself, or was it his wraith? A ghost could not push open the door and enter the room!

He saw a tall fair woman with noble countenance, but so pale and wasted he could scarcely believe he was looking at Godwyn. The change in her did not annoy him as it might once have done; he had ceased to set a high value on that beauty which enthrals through the senses. But a great wave of compas-

sion came over him as he looked at her, a compassion which seemed to lie too deep for words.

"So—this is your kingdom!" he said, gazing round at the squalor of the room.

"I am poor," she answered, with her eyes fixed on the stained old drugget, "and poverty is not so romantic as we used to think it in our childhood. In my case there are few counterbalancing advantages."

"I don't understand you," he said, a little impatiently. "You can't possibly go on living like this."

She laughed nervously as she answered,

"It has been rather bad, I must confess—something like the report of the Medical Benevolent or the Governesses' Institution. To have paid for people's services doesn't justify you in looking

down upon them," she added rather vaguely, "but I have got used to being snubbed as well as to being poor. My best musical compositions have sold for very little."

"And you are unhappy?" he continued, looking down at the rusty black dress which she was wearing.

"It is not a new dress, but a kind-hearted woman gave it to me—the wife of a bookseller to whose children I give music lessons," she answered evasively. "I could not afford a new dress. It will be some time before I can pay off the expenses of—the funeral."

It was almost more than he could bear, and he said in a choked voice,

"I can not bear to see you unhappy."

"Unhappy?" she repeated for the first time, with a quiet smile and with a steady light burning in her eyes. "It is a question I never ask myself; I have no time to ask it. Do you remember, Humphrey, long ago, how affronted you were with me because I told you that unbroken good luck was a doubtful boon for a man? Perhaps it is no bad thing even for you to be reminded sometimes of the existence of suffering."

"In my case there is no need for the moral to be drawn from that admonition," he said a little bluntly. "I have had trouble enough lately, and *you* cannot suffer without a shadow falling upon me. Has your father's death made you sad?"

"No," she said slowly, "not his death—it does not make me sad now. I was comforted about it before he died. I try

to think, when I am not morbid, of that passage in the Bible about the 'sons of glory,' and to believe how all things may be resolved again, even through suffering, into the original glory. My faith wavers sometimes, but I try to think of Who went first through the gates of that suffering."

The serious tenderness of her voice, the liquid inflexions in its sweet, sad tones, touched him, and he answered,

"I have come to fetch you to take you back to Dornton. Did my uncle tell you that of whatever money there may be left, you have a perfect right to take your share?"

She looked him full in the face in her natural straightforward manner, and answered in her unreserved way,

"Yes, he *did* tell me—there can be no occasion to hide anything. He told me

he had made a will bequeathing everything to you."

"That cannot prevent me from helping you," he rejoined, a little sharply.

No, he could not help her, she thought as she shook her head. He was not any relation of hers, and a young man was powerless to help a young woman unless she could give him an excuse stronger than that of Platonic friendship.

"Do you know," he continued hurriedly, "that I have been undutiful for the first time in my life since I heard of what happened in my absence? I have taunted my poor uncle a dozen times for letting you go alone on your quest, and it seems it was your own obstinacy. Why should you not let me help you in the way I long ago proposed to you? If there was a good reason *then*, there is a better reason now why you should

consent to be my wife. I remember how you used to say, 'Are you afraid of the world?' The world is nothing to either of us. It has more reason to abuse *me* than you."

For the first time her bravery seemed to break down. To think that Humphrey's old character should so suddenly have come back to him! The stately head which had never been bowed to the yoke of debt, and was not to be forced down by the iron collar of poverty, was bent like a reed when she heard his words. She hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Godwyn," he said, venturing nearer to her and bending over her slight stooped body, "I have to thank *you* that I am no longer in the rank of drones. It was you who made me first aware of the fatal numbness of deteriora-

tion which was stealing over me, mind and soul. Despise me if you will, as I despise my own self-seeking. God knows how wretched I have been, with all the Furies," he added, with a little attempt at the humorous, "Megæra, Alecto, and the rest of them, crowding upon me, but away from you I shall dwindle morally and spiritually."

She felt as if she were the dupe of some enchanting dream, yet she had too strong a feeling for her own dignity to show the joy which she felt. Hitherto she had been thinking, since she had heard that story about her father, how well it was that Humphrey, with his fastidious ideas about many things, should have escaped what he might have thought the infamy of marrying her, but now the voluntary martyrdom which she had marked out for herself began to have



quite another aspect—for she loved him still. Everything was not dead in her heart—it had not yet ceased to beat with enthusiasm for him. Even now, when he continued to speak, and she heard him but indistinctly, it seemed to her as if he were uttering words, with which she could not just then keep pace. Could it be possible that she heard aright. Esteem, gratitude, trust—ay and Love, which was the king of all—in exchange for the dreariness and barrenness of her lonely life. She knew now how she had shivered in her solitude. Her voice wavered and broke, and the tears still crowded up to her eyes as she faltered,

“ You are very good to me Humphrey. But you talk nonsense. You forget the drawbacks. It is extravagant—impossible !”

"What drawbacks? You need not look so tragic. I don't want to talk bunkum, but a hearty, wholesome love, for the better and not for the worse, need not make you wish to take the words out of my mouth."

"I want you to think seriously of it."

"I was never more sane and serious."

"Look before you—think of your future life—marriage is not everything."

"Godwyn!" he repeated in a tone of remonstrance.

"No, not everything, and a woman is not everything," she added firmly, and yet with a voice which vibrated with feminine tenderness. "I used to think you cared—for—some one else—but—if not—there are other women—richly

dowered—I will not bind you to poverty, to shame and to me.”

“It is *you* now who are talking nonsense,” he said in a voice as if he were deeply hurt. “You have as much as acknowledged that you do not wish to dismiss me, and yet you have such a low opinion of me; you think me so mean and petty——”

“I don’t think you mean,” she began, but she could not finish her sentence. Her eyes met his, and it was as if their spirits had touched—as glance met glance. She knew now that he had always loved her, that he had not been able to help it.

“I am taken by storm,” she said, trying to free herself as her head again sank low, and was—this time—pillowed on his shoulder. He could

feel the beating of her heart against his.

"I have not yet said 'Yes,'" she reminded him, trying to struggle away from him.

"But you have looked it, my wife, my beloved wife!"

"Excuse me. I have known so little happiness, it is something to have no dread of to-morrow's dawn," she explained, wiping away her last tears, as he asked her to say good-bye to the good people of the house and prepare to return to Dornton with him by the next train.

Then he made her smile by telling her of the mortal terror with which he had waited to hear his fate from her lips, and how the pretension of being her husband had seemed to him a sort of sacrilege after all that had happened.

He had meant to add to this a short confession of his brief engagement to Olive, but her perfect trust in him daunted him —his courage failed.

## CHAPTER II.

SEVEN years afterwards it would have been difficult to recognise the village of Dornton, so entirely was its aspect transformed. The picturesque dilapidated cottages, adorned with their tangle of creepers and with pointed thatched roofs, which were formerly so attractive to the eye of an artist, had given place to matter-of-fact, ugly, well-drained, well-ventilated houses for the operatives, the arrangements of which would have satisfied the Earl of Shaftesbury or Dr. Richardson. The church had been restored, and

there was a hard working parson who willingly availed himself of the services rendered by Mrs. Bardsley.

The manor-house had been abandoned previous to Humphrey's marriage and sold to a rich Manchester man with a fancy for antiquarianism, whose first improvement had been to rebuild "the Maiden's Wing." Humphrey and Godwyn had contented themselves with one of the modest little villas which had sprung up with other modern improvements in the neighbourhood of Dornton. Humphrey had hurried on the marriage, setting his face against delay, as soon as he brought Godwyn with him from her hiding-place in London. She had reminded him of her deep mourning, but he had dismissed the objection, saying,

"If we are to be together the sooner the better."

The seven years had been years of hard toil and little recreation to the young wife, who, with scant money and many domestic duties, had risen early and sat up late to help her husband to retrieve the difficulties of his past mismanagement.

“If you really mean it—mean that *I* can be the happiness and consolation of your life—do you imagine I will not marry you?” she had said timidly and hurriedly when Humphrey urged what some people would have called imprudent haste. Since that time they had had many drawbacks in the way of comparative poverty, and many difficulties with the workpeople, but Godwyn’s face had ever shone with the light which had made tears impossible. Her distress for her father’s misfortunes and her regret for what had been irremediable were all things of the past: her whole being seemed to be steeped in a



pure atmosphere of joy. To say that she saw Humphrey through the rainbow-tinted light necessary to the strongest love is but to say that he was human. The heart that can bear to have its inmost weaknesses revealed must be a very pure and holy one, and most of us, brothers and sisters, who have known the happiness of being loved, must have been seen at some period of our lives through such a glorified medium.

“Refreshing to the eyes and refreshing to the ears, with a *sancta simplicitas*,” a young University man who had come to read during the summer vacation at Dorn-ton had once described Mrs. Bardsley, as he watched her slipping unobtrusively on her kindly errands to the cottages. Nor was his description far from the truth.

The little white cap, giving a matronly

appearance to her bright young face, seemed to be in harmony with the calmness of her expression and the clear look of her peaceful eyes; and if she was not rich enough to be clothed in the most expensive fashions of the day, so as to entice the eye, her simple little toilettes were always crisp and fresh, and her laughter like the ripple of sweet sounds.

“Blessings, like troubles, seem never to come alone,” said Humphrey, smiling, when a second girl was presented to him instead of the gift he had wished for, “that unfeathered two-legged thing, a son.” The little girls were now five and six years old, and prattled to the great amusement of old Mr. Bardsley, who, though now close to his seventieth birthday, seemed, thanks to Godwyn’s careful nursing, to be scarcely more infirm than

on the day when his nephew was married.

It seemed strange to Godwyn that Humphrey should occasionally weary of the undisturbed seclusion which to her was the height of bliss. He had given up his easy-going ways, but it could not be said that he was altogether satisfied. He had to do without many things to which he had formerly been accustomed. He was strict in requiring that work should be done well and to time, though he spoke courteously to all whom he employed. But the times had been bad, and there was a tacit assumption amongst his workmen that he was as poor a man in his way as they were in theirs.

"What does it matter; it is only money;" Godwyn would answer with a beaming face which seemed to reproach

him when he lamented over his loss of fortune.

"The world is only tiresome to a heart fully occupied, though it may be useful as a distraction," she said to him one day when he lamented the want of superfluous cash which made it almost impossible for them to join in what might *now* be called the gaieties of Dornton, the place being so much more frequented than it had been. "I am too happy in myself—its pleasures would be monotonous to me—parties would seem so ordinary."

Her lively imagination found infinitely more resources in the everyday attractions of domestic life. And though the days were past when, in the beginning of their married life, Humphrey had been wont to read to her as she worked, sometimes thoughtful passages from Wordsworth, and sometimes in low *legato* tones, favourite

lines from *The Angel in the House*, yet happiness such as theirs seemed to her to be the one vestige left in this weak, shifting world of a higher, happier, and nobler life. To her husband, if he petted her less, she had become, as it were, a new conscience, such a reverential belief did he have in her. This confidence, this unimpaired trust, seemed to her to be in itself an exquisite reward.

“It is too good to be true,” she would sometimes murmur to herself, thanking God when she remembered that no side wind of discord had ever yet reached her home; the inmost “penetralia” were unstirred and unsullied as at first.

And the changes at Dornton were very satisfactory to her. It was pleasant to watch by degrees how the rough-bearded, ill-clad, slovenly men and women began to look very much like other civilised

beings. Poor Ned Carslake, with the "devils cast out of him," tossed and tormented in spirit no longer, had settled down into comfortable domestic life with a pretty apple-cheeked girl in one of the cleanliest cottages.

Once or twice the Bardsleys had had news of Olive Neale, now the Countess von Hannenberg. A friend who had visited Florence one winter had volunteered information of how she lived, "in a temperature that reminded one of Calcutta, and was terribly fond of perfumes as well as of Worth's costumes." But Humphrey was scarcely so interested in these details as Godwyn; he had ceased to trouble himself about Olive or the tales of her personal adornment, since he had learnt that comeliness of body must be accompanied by fairness of soul. And so it happened that the young wife never heard of

her husband's former brief engagement. If the old man had ever suspected the story, the thought of it passed away from him now that his memory had begun to fail him.

“Clear as crystal, true as steel,” so Godwyn prided herself were Humphrey's thoughts, and his memories open as day to her. “No concealment has ever come between us, thank God,” she would say to herself with a grateful heart, when after her hard-working days she lay down to refreshing sleep with much the same delicious sense of fatigue as that which rewards the tired mountaineer.

## CHAPTER III.

WHEN the sun has risen in an immaculate sky the first hours of the day have often a purity and calmness which a looker-on is tempted to think will endure. But it is just on one of these mornings that little winds arise, and little clouds like delicate veils seem soon to be held by invisible hands near the horizon. The Bardsleys' home appeared to be an Eden. But into this temporary Eden, like the apple thrown into the garden of Hesperides, came a letter from the Countess von Hannenberg.



With a nature which must either retrograde or go forward, with powers for good and evil in it so that one could see it growing or degenerating day by day, Olive had sunk lower during the intervening years. For a time the possession of her wealth had made her happy. It was beyond measure delightful for a woman of her vain and luxurious nature to be able to gratify every desire—to have her equipages, her dress, and her beauty the admiration and source of envy to men and women—to be no longer a mere nobody, but a countess who, on the strength of her petty title, could keep aloof from the Smiths and Joneses, and all the ruck of English people—to have her receptions at Florence and her season at Monaco. Plentiful flirtations and high play had been the characteristics of her *salon*, seasoned with good

music for the more proper of her guests.

It little mattered that the old Count complained of the extravagance of the young Englishwoman whom he had married for her beauty; she boasted that she could turn him round her little finger whenever she chose, as she could turn all men from eighteen to eighty. She had never had any intention of compromising herself, and as long as her mother lived Mrs. Neale had been compelled to be satisfied with the fact that no absolute stain rested on the reputation of her daughter. But when that mother had been suddenly carried away by a sharp attack of Roman fever, Olive's sense of desolation was great. Often before had she jested when her heart was sore, and had worn a laughing face to hide its aching. And now that her partial mother had been taken from

her, and that Mrs. Neale's tender little speeches no longer came to ameliorate the twinges of conscience, her dainty life—in which her delicate flesh was wrapped in purple and fine linen—was instinct with misery. The excitement which would make life go on without thinking became necessary to her very existence, and whenever that excitement ceased her mind would prey on itself, drawing imaginary miseries through the “invisible suckers” of her sick fancy.

This state of things had continued till the death of the Count, who left his wife scarcely so richly dowered as had been generally expected. Some of his money went to the Romish priests for the restoration of a cathedral, and gossips whispered that if Madame had played her cards a little more cleverly, and had not let her flirtations be quite so patent

to all observers, her chances of a successful second marriage would have been greatly increased. As it was, some of her admirers found that they had pressing engagements at Mentone and Nice, and she—craving still to believe in her own power of domination, and unwilling to remain at Monaco with a lessened court—found her thoughts turning longingly to her dear friends in England.

“It seems to me it would be a perfect Elysium to come and live at Dornton. All my simplest and happiest memories are connected with that dear place,” she wrote in gushing words to Godwyn. “How I should like to see you both! your good husband the Corydon, you the neat-handed Phyllis, and then your sweet little ones. I have fancied you with a kind of magnetic power of soothing a baby—an extra-natural prescience

of its wants. I daresay you have all the poor people's babies—a crèche, a kindergarten, and goodness knows what. I remember your inventive genius in the dear old past. I shall bring some of my furniture with me. I could not live without pretty things, but please to take a *rural* cottage for me, one with honeysuckle round the porch. I shall not trouble you much with my wants, time and quietness will be necessary to restore my shattered strength, but I should like so much to live near you and to return to dear old England."

What Humphrey thought when the letter was read was known only to himself. He made little or no remark about the Countess's projected visit.

"Dead—her husband dead!" he said, and changed colour a little, remembering the time when he had been under Olive's

influence at Monaco, and on the borders of not believing in anything better. But his wife, with her usual energy, set about employing workmen to repair a "rural" cottage with moderate rent and plentiful accommodation, to suit the fancy of the widowed lady. An architect was sent for from Knaresbury to decorate the walls and inlay the floors according to the elaborate directions received from Madame von Hännenberg.

There was great excitement among the natives at Dornton when a "foreigner" man-servant appeared with a number of big boxes as a precursor to the arrival of the Countess and her maid. It was towards the close of the next day before Godwyn thought it right to intrude upon her old acquaintance. Very pretty looked the cottage in the yellow

light of evening, with the veined and patterned ivy creeping up its trellised walls, and a tangle of greenery round the porch.

Godwyn had never before seen anything like the interior, with the Oriental walls, costly china, chairs and tables with writhen legs, a tempered light thrown by rose-coloured curtains, an atmosphere of patchouli, and a silence as of poppyfied sleep. And as she advanced with that mixture of serenity and graciousness which was one of her chief charms, a fair figure in flowing weeds, with a dainty little erection on her glossy hair, which did duty as a widow's cap, started up from one of the picturesque chairs, and came eagerly towards her with both hands outstretched.

"This is so good of you!" said a

voice, more musical, if more forced, than the voice which had belonged to the Olive of old. "Do you remember the dear old times?"

Never in her girlhood had Godwyn been so tenderly clasped, and as she gently freed herself from the embrace she had time to look at the speaker.

Olive was no longer a beauty, with roundness of outline and varying colour, as she had been in her girlhood. Her complexion was whiter than it had been of yore, and on either cheek was a stain like the deep blush of a rose petal which Godwyn could not know was attributable to art. The two faces formed a marked contrast. Godwyn's cheeks, undyed with vermeil stain, were paler than they had been before the toils of her married life. But the shining lamps of joy were all alight as usual in her



clear eyes, whilst in the expression of Madame von Hannenberg's face was no look of settled contentment bespeaking the inward satisfaction which could radiate such a light. The eyes, indeed, were hackneyed diplomatists, trained to obey her will, but belied in the tell-tale mouth—a mouth which in former days had never seemed to be made for kissing, but which now made Godwyn feel ungracious if she did not return the kiss.

“What do you think of my little nest?” she said, as she drew Mrs. Bardsley to a seat.

“I think it a charming drawing-room, enough to make you dream of poetry,” answered Godwyn, looking round her with admiration.

“Ah, the poetry is all yours! *I* have known little poetry since I left England.

Time, which ripens and rots, has given you all the sunshine, but has dealt hardly with *me*. I never repented but once."

The repressed restlessness in her manner made a disagreeable impression on Godwyn. It seemed as if Olive had gratified every fantastic wish till she was feverish and exhausted; and the Cleopatra-like luxury had palled upon her. Was she in earnest or in joke? The young wife felt uncomfortable as she pondered. Would this strange friend treat Humphrey to the like confidences, or did the confidences mean nothing at all, and was it still—as it had been in the old days—her habit to speak by impulse?

"But you *were* happy—you must have been happy when your dear mother

and husband were with you," she said softly.

"I was *not* happy—I will not tell a fib about it to satisfy any one—no, I was never happy in that foreign life. There was a short period, to be sure, when I met Humphrey at Monaco—Ah, I could tell you so much about those days. You are a fortunate woman!" she added, with a little fluttering sigh.

"You are tired with your journey. I think I had better not disturb you any longer now. Most of us, when we have troubles, require a little time to recover ourselves," answered Godwyn, rising and speaking as calmly as ever, though she was conscious of a sudden beating at her heart.

"Ah, you are unsympathetic; that is the fault of you good religious people.

You are raised on such a platform above us earthlier mortals, and can look down with such contempt on all human weaknesses! I thought to have told you all about my story, but even *you* will not listen to me. Oh! the blunders we make, the ruin we make of our lives!" and, putting up her dainty handkerchief to her face, she burst into sudden and unmistakable tears.

Godwyn was really touched, but thought it better to leave her to herself, sending kindly messages the next morning, and promising to come again as soon as the widow had recovered from the effects of her grief and the fatigue of her journey.

"I will wait till she sends to me," she explained to Humphrey, who bit his lips and was inclined to sneer at her account of the interview.

"Why does she come here calling herself Countess? A German Count is nothing, you know. I am no tuft-hunter, and I should have said the Neales were superior to this nonsense. She has learnt these artificial ways at Monaco, you may be sure of it. I don't wish you to be too intimate. We must keep her at a distance."

"You speak in riddles, Humphrey. It is not like *you* to be unkind to a widow," said Godwyn remonstratingly, to which remark her husband vouchsafed no reply.

It so happened that on the next day he was brought face to face with Olive, who was walking, veiled and unattended, in one of the lonely paths near the wood. He had taken off his hat automatically in the presence of a woman, but was intending to pass her without stopping

to speak, when she stood still, and, looking distressed, held out her hands, saying,

"We are friends. Mr. Bardsley, tell me the truth, are we not *real* friends? You don't know how few friends there are left for me in life."

Her beautiful eyes had fixed themselves in earnest appeal on his, and he blamed himself for a want of gallantry as he answered her coldly,

"Why did you leave the Continent? I should have thought that your truest friends would have been found amongst those who knew Count von Hanneberg."

She gave a little shrug.

"You know I hate Germany, the people have such upstart notions there; and as to living in Paris, why I should care nothing about it since the Empire has

crumbled away; the Emperor began to yield too much to the Left even during his life-time," she said, trying to speak lightly.

"This comes second-hand from the poor Count," he thought as he answered coldly as before. "I disagree with you; the age of absolutism is past. I never knew you had a turn for politics; and then there was still Florence, or your favourite Monaco—you might have studied politics *there*; I believe they intend to make a change. The reign of M. Blanc is threatened sooner or later, I hear, and *I* should say so much the better."

"Oh, you were always severe," she replied with a forced laugh. "I remember you used not to admit that I had any brains at all; you will find that my wits have been sharpened in the keenness of the foreign atmosphere." And then

altering her voice and visibly trembling, with real tears in her eyes—"You must not be angry with me; you must forgive me for the past. I do *so* like your wife! We are all going to be friends together. You must not think I am intruding on you. I shall keep as much as possible to myself. If you have heard any gossip about me you must not let *her* believe it. There is one drawback about good women—they are always so hard; but Godwyn used not to be so hard as some. They were always abusing me at Monaco. It was jealousy, you know. I might have been a black sheep if you were to credit those women. Ah, but I know you think better of me. I was silly, but not black at all."

She was smiling at him through her tears, but he showed no sign of wincing at her speech, not even when she pro-



ceeded to comment on the alterations at Dornton—on the new roofs, mended walls, and whitewashed cottages which met her eyes everywhere.

“ We had to give up the windows with diamond panes, and the pretty chimneys which would have smoked;—the honeysuckles, roses and ivy meant spiders; and the old woodwork meant black beetles,” he said following the direction of her eyes.

“ It was really a downright imposition to persuade you to spend your hard-earned money like that,” she answered, speaking more like her old self as they walked back together; “ and on cattle who only turn round on you, assault you, and abuse you at the first opportunity; but it was a fad of Godwyn’s to spoil these people, I remember, years ago. For my part, I think it is dreadful

to have to improve the condition of the poor, and often against their will."

"It is not only a fad of Godwyn's but a fad of mine," he said, as he took leave of her, with a polite bow, at the door of her Arcadian lodging, declining her invitation to enter.

"Oh, to be sure—you and your wife together—you ought to leaven the country. I remember how I heard at a distance that you were bent on improving the habits and wages of all the labouring classes," she answered with a ready laugh. But not the less did she think to herself, "that wife of his—he forgets that she does not monopolise all the beauty and talent in England."

"You are looking quite spick and span in all your arrangements," said the Countess, when she returned Godwyn's

visit after the interval of a few days. "I really wonder how you are clever enough to manage it, with this idea of taking the poorer people under a sort of maternal government, and of patching up the property by slow and steady saving."

"Who told you all about it?" asked Godwyn in some surprise.

"Oh, your husband to be sure; he was giving me a long account of it. You forget what old friends we were," said the pretty widow with a bright smile, and Mrs. Bardsley was ashamed of herself for a pang like a stab that turned her sick at heart, and for which she could not account.

"I assure you I get more amusement out of the cottages than I had out of my favourite doll's house when I was a child," she said, trying to

conquer the pang, and to speak with an answering smile. "Once a month I make a rule of visiting each of them to see if anything in the way of repairs or alteration is necessary."

"Oh, I see—a sort of patriarchal arrangement. You should have lived with the Bedouins in the days of Job, but it must be dull work for you, I should think."

"Not at all; the first things we think of are the improvements and repairs of the cottages. Humphrey promised that when he married me, and he has kept his bargain beautifully."

"Well," said Olive, with a yawn which she could not repress, "these are amongst the things which I cannot comprehend, but which I suppose I ought to admit with the same respect as mysteries of the faith. But I wonder you

got your husband to fall in with all your arrangements. Men are so unsympathetic and slow to understand. I have learnt to like women better."

"Those who look for their reward in heaven ought not to expect it in this life," she said in the same vein to Humphrey with a meaning smile the next time she met him. "Your wife is very frank with me; I suppose I ought to profit by her good sense. It would have been all the better for me if I had minded her scoldings more when I was a girl; but is she not a little—what shall I say?—solemn and *triste*? And is she not likely to wear herself out prematurely with all these self-imposed duties? Does it not strike you that she is looking just a trifle worn and too old for her age? Excuse me—of course I speak as an interested friend."

"Natures vary," answered Humphrey sternly. "My wife, thank God, has a sound constitution and an active brain, always busying herself with some scheme for the good of others. She would be able to exorcise the demon of dulness from the dullest of English homes. I believe she could make herself happy even on Robinson Crusoe's island."

"With or without you. I envy her that quality of being self-sufficing," said Olive with a quivering sigh.

"Happier a good deal than some of the fashionable women who invent death's heads for themselves at their feasts, and gaze at all the gauds of the world with sated eyes," he continued, unmindful of the interruption, and yet that very evening, inconsistent as it seemed, he remarked, for the first time, on what he

called the "dowdy" appearance of Godwyn's head-gear.

"Till *she* came, he would not have altered a hair of my head, and now he is always looking at me critically," thought the wife, with a tear which started involuntarily to her eyes, as for the first time she spent half-an-hour at the looking-glass, endeavouring in vain to arrange her hair in the artistic erection which would have risen so easily under the nimble fingers of Olive's clever French maid.

Madame von Hanneberg was now a constant visitor at the villa.

"I mean to come *very soon* again," she would say, kissing her hand and taking her departure after wasting one of Godwyn's precious afternoons, breaking in upon her leisure and begging her to send the children away, though she would tell

her in the same breath that she was the "sort of motherly woman who ought to have a baby always on hand."

Godwyn was not suspicious, and was willing at first to believe that her former friend was now too miserable to be a coquette. But after a time she could not help remarking it as strange that Olive generally deferred these visits till a late hour in the afternoon, and stood in need of Humphrey's escort to accompany her back to the cottage. On one occasion Godwyn had offered herself to walk back with Madame von Hannenberg, but as her health was just then a little delicate, she had no answer to make to the ready protestation,

"No, I won't allow you—I won't indeed. You will tire yourself if you walk too far."

The evenings were drawing in though



it was early in September, and Mrs. Bardsley had the candles lit as she saw the two depart, remarking to herself how much more cleverly Olive talked since she had lived abroad, and noticing the growing interest in Humphrey's face as he listened to her.

"I am not jealous. Of all faults jealousy is the one I hate most," she sighed to herself as she sat down to a pile of stockings, the mending of which had been necessarily delayed because such homely work could not be brought out in the presence of Olive. It would now be necessary for her to sit up very late at the mending that night, or to rise, as she had often done before, when her husband would be asleep and would know nothing about it the next morning. But it was not this thought which depressed her or which obliged her to throw down

her work, going to the piano and strumming a few bars with a hope that the harmonies might soothe her. She looked at the garden, where, in consequence of a gale on the preceding night, the dead leaves were strewn thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. There are moments when happiness seems so fragile a thing, when we so fear to have it shattered, that we are almost ready to envy those who never have known it. Godwyn felt like a child holding a captive bird, and feeling in its hand the struggling and beating of its wings. If the child relaxes its grasp the bird has flown away for ever. And yet happiness was worth nothing that had to be held perforce.

“He could have stayed quite well at the mills; he used to do so before she came. And when she has two servants, either of whom could have called to walk home

with her, he need not have hurried away just because she wished it," was the common-sense reflection which, in spite of all her brave resolutions, she was unable to stifle, as she wondered whether the old sense of fascination which this woman, whom she had never heartily liked, had been wont to exercise over her husband, had returned, in spite of newer and holier ties—just a little.

## CHAPTER IV.

TO paint the first agitation of a heart the poets have compared it to a peaceful lake disturbed by a breath of air to a slight trembling. It is nothing yet; only the wind stirring the water to gentle ripples; the lake can still recover its clear serenity. And so, though a vague uneasiness had for a short time filled Godwyn's heart, it was easy for her to recover her habitual calm, her absolute confidence in her husband. She put the idea away from her that there could

be any change in his feeling towards her.

"It would be inexcusable for me to take fancies into my head now that I am growing older," she would say to herself when she was occupied, as usual, in fondling her children or in occupying herself with the affairs of her household. "When one is very young quick revolutions or exaggerations of feeling are the more to be excused, but one's own personality should dwindle to its proper size, as maturer age teaches us perspective."

But in Olive's mind this personality was wont to assume enormous proportions; she had always been apt to fancy herself either adored or abhorred. And to find herself now dismally advancing past thirty—with life which could not be a perpetual *fête à la Watteau*, and with existence at Dornton already becoming a

weariness to the flesh and spirit alike—was more than her egotistical nature could endure. The sight of the Bardsleys' quiet happiness became at times intolerable to her. She had already wearied of unhealthy pleasures, of the pomp of the world and the pride of life, with that tendency to discontent ringing its sad changes on the old theme so common to disappointed human nature. She could hardly have explained her own motive in seeking for distraction at Dornton. Something of good there might have been in it at first, coupled with a faint remembrance of past times, and of Godwyn's insight into the better possibilities of her nature. She had known even during her short engagement to Humphrey that she could not suffice for him.

“He may *amuse* himself with me,” she

had said to herself during that short experience at Monaco, "but he knows all the time that there are other women with whom he could think high thoughts and perform noble deeds instead of being forced to descend to me."

Yet the tendency to amuse and to be amused existed still, in spite of the whispers which had reached her ears from the people in the neighbourhood, who had already begun to comment on Mr. Bardsley's constant visits to the fair widow, and Madame von Hannenberg's constant presence at the villa—whispers which had not yet seriously disturbed Godwyn's peace, thoughts of evil or of scandal having never yet sullied the purity of her mind.

"I don't think she means to be always intruding on us, but it would be better taste if she would leave us oftener to our-

selves," she would think sometimes with a sigh, when the needlework had to be put on one side and dainty little dinners to be prepared to suit the foreign taste of the Countess.

That tendency to grow tired of everything artificial which is inherent in human nature gave a certain flavour of piquancy to Olive's visits to the Bardsleys. She had never seen anything like it before; but even the novelty of this wore off after a time, and she began to pity Godwyn for living in a state of isolation, as if she had been the wife of a Turk.

"Why we never had such fashions as these abroad; you might as well be in a cloister," she said to her one day, when Humphrey had left them together, hiding her tendency to yawn with a lace pocket-handkerchief.

"I have my children," answered God-



wyn with a bright smile, while Olive was secretly wishing that the "little wretches" could be sent out of the way.

"Dear me! how shabby you are!" she exclaimed on another occasion when Godwyn, who had been superintending some household work, came to her when she called, forgetful of her unfashionable attire. "You really ought to dress better. It is not doing justice to yourself, and yet somehow your dress suits you—you don't look bad in it," she added relenting, as she looked at the grave, gentle, forbearing face.

It seemed to her that such a life must be insufferably stupid, and she began to lament the ill-judged impulse which had prompted her to come to such a humdrum place.

All her old supports had been suddenly

taken from her; it was in vain for her to try to cling to any of them. If she could have shaken beds, rubbed tables, or taken turns with her own housemaid, the ghost of *ennui* which was goading her into mischief, might have been kept at arm's length. But, as it was, she could not enjoy the monotony of the free seaside life; the air, she complained, was too keen for her, the sunshine too dazzling. Dressed in a morning wrapper of white cashmere, her lustrous hair hanging about her shoulders, her attitudes and her smallest movements graceful, she would "pose" behind her rose-coloured curtains, with dainty cups of coffee—one ever ready for her old friend Mr. Bardsley—to help her to pass the languid hours, during the greater part of the day. When the evenings drew on she would "drop

in," as Humphrey phrased it, at the villa.

"Oh dear, I have been so 'naughty disturbing you both so long with all my senseless chatter," she would say as she took leave of the inmates after the lapse of an hour or two.

"I begin to think she is more beautiful than ever," Godwyn would force herself to acknowledge, repressing the pang at her heart which had been so hard for her to bear before she had properly schooled herself.

That the widow *did* amuse Humphrey, and perhaps a little too well, was patent to all outsiders if not to Godwyn. Even the servants would sometimes remark on it in the absence of their master and mistress, speaking a few plain Saxon truths with homely, downright, not to say coarse language, which, if they could

have been heard by the strange lady, might have done her a little good.

"She seems very dull, poor thing. It is only kind of you to ask her to pay you long visits," said Humphrey, entirely ignoring the fact that these long visits cut horribly into Godwyn's time, and that she had to bear them when she was often longing to be alone.

On some occasions the effort to endure the infliction of this constant and unsympathetic companionship became so great that Godwyn had a constrained emotionless manner which before the coming of the Countess had never been habitual with her.

"I see how it is. I break in upon your happiness *à deux*—your duet like Adam and Eve," she said a little irritably, to Humphrey one evening, when for polite-

ness' sake he escorted her back to the cottage.

"You are always joking," he answered, and there was a look in his face which seemed to tell her that he thought her jokes were not always in the best of taste.

The calm look irritated her more than ever. Why did he scrutinise her coldly like this? Could she tell him the truth? that she tried to laugh in order that she might not be obliged to weep?

"We who are amongst the disinherited," she said bitterly, "as we look at the spectacle of the happiness of other people are obliged to joke—I suppose as the comic actors joke—the poor clowns with their pressing necessities, who are said to shed tears behind the absurdity of their masks. I will explain to you all about it—I have often wanted to explain—how miserable I

was in that foreign life after you left me."

"No, no—I beg you will not. I don't wish to pry into your late husband's affairs."

And there was a curious kindling of his face, a flash, a something she knew not what, which disappeared in a moment and left her aching with the consciousness of her mistake in her tactless reference to the troubles of her former life. A film had been mercifully drawn over past events. Was it not well that it should remain drawn still? For a few moments they walked on together in a dead stupid silence, and then she said in a voice which told of a repressed sob,

"The world is horribly empty to me—and you—you have been like a good providence to me. I thought you would show more sympathy."

It was necessary for him to speak.

The trouble visible in her face seemed to compel him to break the silence.

"You have told me plainly enough that your marriage was not a happy one, but it seems to me you had all you could expect from the bargain. I did not think it was necessary for me to go back to these old reminiscences," he answered, still speaking coldly.

"He left me almost penniless," she muttered complainingly. "I could not keep up any style in a place bigger than Dornton."

Humphrey shrugged, and would have liked to tell her that the style she kept up at Dornton was perfectly unnecessary.

"My situation was a very equivocal one. I think it would have killed me if it had gone on."

"Ah!" he said, making the "Ah!" as eloquent as possible, as if to say

"That has nothing to do with *me*."

"He had his revenge upon me by telling me he would leave me scarcely anything."

"I don't suppose he could help it," murmured her companion, remembering that certain reports had reached him as to how the extravagant Countess had managed to spend a great deal of the money.

"Then you too despise me," she exclaimed, growing impatient, "just because I happened to be a little unconventional. Because the world is cruel, mean, and contemptible shall we yield to its rule? shall we slavishly obey its fancied obligations?"

"The question is too difficult for me to answer unless I know more of the circumstances," he said, snapping off the head of the flower with his stick.

"But you refused to hear."



"I will hear you on one condition—that I may be allowed to repeat everything you say—to my wife."

Her lips began to tremble and her eyes to fill; her heart beat so that she was afraid she might betray her agitation.

"Would it not be better to entrust my wife with any confidence you may have to make? She is ever ready to feel for any one who has suffered," he added more gently.

"Oh, yes, I know your wife is immaculate," she answered, almost beneath her breath, as she hurried on in front of him to the path which led through the wood on the way to her cottage.

Every word which was spoken in praise of Godwyn—of her cleverness, her industry, and her unselfishness—irritated her in her present mood to the last extreme of endurance. The conflict of feelings

within her, the wounded vanity, the failure which she had made of her life and the gnawing jealousy at her heart, could have driven her at that moment to any extremity of foolishness.

"You are very pale," he said, alarmed by her appearance as he offered her his arm. "I hope you have no weakness of the heart."

She looked at him fixedly to see if he had any *arrière pensée*. But he continued, nothing abashed,

"Heart complaints so often cause this sudden pallor."

"Oh I am afraid it is generally much less interesting. I am terribly in want of of my supper," she answered, trying to rival him in simplicity.

She dragged her black lace shawl more closely round her and staggered in her walk, saying,

"Not any further just at present. I suppose," she added with an attempted laugh, "it is because I am hungry, but I am tired; let us rest."

She was trembling as she sank upon a wooden bench which had been placed for the convenience of the foot-passengers beneath one of the trees.

"I cannot breathe," she said presently, tearing at the white lace handkerchief, which was scarcely so snowy as the whiteness of her neck.

He went rapidly to the walk and called, but no one answered—the wood was deserted. Hastening back, he found her stretched on the seat in a faint. He tried to think that young women often fainted, and yet he feared that this faint was like death. He became alarmed, and bent over her, pale as herself, in excitement and intense anxiety. A sigh escaped

from her, and her eyes opened and looked at him vaguely.

Just at that moment a rustling was heard amongst the leaves, and before Humphrey had time to call her a woman from one of the neighbouring cottages had passed them with a light step, and was hurrying away. He tried to make her hear him, but his voice had become difficult of control, and for the first time it occurred to him how strange the scene might have appeared to an outsider, and how difficult it might be for him to account for it afterwards. He was more embarrassed than Olive, who seemed to have recovered from the results of her faint with wonderful quickness.

"Oh, I entreat you," she said, stopping him when he continued to call the cottager. "If this is talked about I never could set a foot in this place again. I am not

given to fainting, and people might think it so odd. Invent some excuse to account for my being so tired, and this sudden unaccustomed faintness. Say that we lost our way in too long a walk, had taken the wrong road, or anything you like."

"Calm yourself," he replied, turning it over in his mind, and agreeing with her that the thing was unfortunate and might seem to need some excuse. "Cannot you try to walk? Godwyn may wonder at my long absence."

## CHAPTER V.

“ I KNOW there can be nothing really amiss,” thought Godwyn, busying herself with her home work more ardently than ever, when the poisonous rumours—which are engendered in men’s minds, growing, as some nauseous fungi grow in the vegetable world, to bulky and unwholesome proportions in the course of a few hours—could no longer be hidden from her.

“What is wrong?” Humphrey had asked, when he returned home the

next day and missed his accustomed greeting in the brightness of his wife's smile.

"Oh, nothing!" she tried to answer, in spite of the wistful look which she gave him, as her lip quivered, and she bent lower over her needlework that he might not see the expression of her face. But the same moment her heart smote her for her unintentional untruthfulness. And when he answered, coming nearer to her, "I know there *is* something," the blood sprang to her face, and she did not again rebut the accusation.

The something unknown which could not always be warded off, as it reached her in an indirect way through the gossiping of others, but which she did not care to think about and hardly believed in, had yet caused an alteration in her manner.

She seemed to have grown grave and stately as she welcomed Madame von Hannenberg the next time she came to visit her. Olive was in her turn slightly embarrassed, having heard unfavourable comments made in loud tones on her conduct as she walked through the village, and having furbished up her weapons of defence and fastened on her corselet of steel before she came to idle away her spare time, as usual, at the villa.

“She cannot come between us now, but I ought to show her what I feel,” thought Godwyn as she blushed slightly, then came forward and held out her hand, looking at Olive earnestly, as if she could see to the depth of her heart. At that moment it would have been easy to decide which was really the most irresistible of the two women, the one with her soul



shining through the clear windows of her eyes, and the mere surface beauty hiding the untruthfulness of the other.

"You have not been well—the walk was too much for you the other night," she said with her direct straightforwardness. "What a pity to take so long a walk! You see I am really quite as strong as you. Wouldn't it be better for us all to walk together in future?"

"Oh, I am sorry to have made you anxious," stammered the Countess in reply. "I think we were both of us a little moonstruck. It was not altogether according to the rules of etiquette, but the moonlight affected our brains, I daresay. We ran on together like a couple of——" She would liked to say "idiots," but hesitated, and added on second thoughts, "children."

Again their eyes met and Olive

burst into a peal of somewhat harsh laughter.

“Oh your face is quite a study. It always used to be, I recollect—of primitive simplicity—and—that sort of surprised look—as if you were the first woman just formed out of Adam’s rib.”

After that Madame von Hannenbergh did not come quite so often to visit Godwyn, not finding her so ductile as she had expected. The two women saw less and less of each other. But Olive continued to stay at Dornton, though more than one person wondered that she did not take her leave of a place in which there was nothing to attract her. To Humphrey especially it was not endurable that reasons should be invented for her staying which were offensive to himself.

"As if one cared a rush for the fibs which a set of gaping noodles choose to tell," he said half savagely to Captain Newland, who, now a middle-aged man, and on a term of absence from India, during which he had had little to enliven him, came often to visit his old *protégée*, Nellie Payton's daughter, and to make himself at home in the Bardsleys' house at Dornton.

Charlie Newland, bachelor though he was, could not help being sensible of the indefinable change which had taken place in the domestic atmosphere when he returned to visit his friends after a stay in London, and found Madame von Hannenberg, as it were, "in possession."

He thought Godwyn prettier in her changes of colour, wavering from one emotion to another, but he saw that she

had grown thin. It was useless to sound her on the subject, for the power which an educated, cultivated woman has in supreme crises of concealing her thoughts served her well at this juncture.

"I should be sorry if my husband were so occupied at home as not to have any time to spare for his friends," she only said with a smile when the Captain hinted one day that the Countess was a designing, intriguing woman, just the type of woman of which he had such a horror in India.

"Poor thing! Are you not a little hard on her? You should make excuses for her bringing up," was all he could get out of Mrs. Bardsley.

But, reticent as she was, he lost all his patience with the husband. Humphrey was fond enough of his wife "in a

way" he was sure, but could he not see that she was drooping from being left so much to her own resources—not to say neglected? Had he no eyes to appreciate and admire this fair, gentle creature as she sat there by the side of the fire—hour after hour alone and apparently uncared for—her head bent down over her sewing, and the warm light touching the graceful lines of her neck, the snowy collar and the tender curves of her cheek? Was he fool enough not to be able to appreciate the steady lambent light shining in those clear brown eyes?

Newland stirred the fire impatiently for her, and kicked away a stool which lay close to him as some relief to his feelings. He did not believe one half of the accusations which were brought against Humphrey Bardsley by the gossips in the neighbourhood, but he

thought that Humphrey was, to say the least of it, weak.

He was vexed with himself for having asked any questions, as he saw that Godwyn's face blushed hotly and looked uncomfortable as she bent lower over her sewing.

"Do not you sit too long over your needle-work? You are not looking quite so well as usual," he said in his kindly, quiet way, hoping to turn the conversation with the readiness and ease of an old familiar friend. "You should not run out to the door so often without a shawl to look after those little ones of yours now the nights are getting a little colder."

He determined never again to mention Madame von Hannenberg to her. But as a last resource he blurted out his suspicions to Humphrey.

"You have hit the wrong nail on the head," said the latter in dudgeon. "Madame von Hannenberg troubles neither my heart nor my imagination. I cared for her in a sort of way once, but I have no reason to dread a relapse. I love Godwyn as I have always loved her, and no power on earth can shake my attachment for her; but she must be reasonable, like other people."

They walked on together in silence. This was the first shadow that had been cast on their friendship, and they were irritated with each other.

"I should have said that your wife had more than her fair share of reason," remarked the elder man presently, feeling himself to be in a dilemma. "If she is not what you call 'reasonable' I wonder why that can be. To tell you

the truth, I should like to have your authority for muzzling certain gossip-mongers—the rumours affect you unpleasantly.”

“Rumours! If there are rumours that must be Godwyn’s fault—jealousy or something of the sort. I suppose women are accustomed to those sort of feelings, even the best of them, and you—you who have travelled so much and seen so many charming women in the course of your life—you will never make me believe that you are ignorant of this very common phase of their character. I assure you there is not the slightest ground for such rumours, but the workpeople make themselves fools about my wife. She is their idol, and they cry out before she is hurt. A bad state of things, I venture to think, for every one of us,” he added,



trying to turn off the subject. But it was not to be so treated.

They walked on, bitter in their hearts against each other. It is always dangerous for one man to attempt to give another advice, and Captain Newland was irritated beyond endurance at the obstinacy and infatuation of his friend. He had ventured too far to draw back, and continued, speaking more earnestly,

"I don't think it has anything to do with the workpeople. Women's eyes are very sharp in anything which concerns their affections. You cannot deny that Godwyn looks unhappy, and that she is dreamy, abstracted, and not as she used to be."

"Unhappy without reason! She is —well, not naturally more jealous than other women, but she is jealous. I

must cure her of that one defect; a jealous wife may become intolerable," he muttered in so low a tone that Newland, intent on giving emphasis to his own warning, did not hear him.

"As to that other woman who has intruded herself upon you, and for whom you care no more than I do, but who flatters your vanity, I can see her little game," he continued bitterly. "The spectacle of your love—your complete happiness—has moved her as it has moved me, and *she* is the one who has become in reality jealous. Take my advice—make an excuse; break off your acquaintance with her, and the memory of all this will be quickly effaced; it will be as if it never had been; it——"

"And pray what reason am I to give

for treating this lady with indignity? My wife, as you remarked, has shown herself abstracted and cold enough to me lately," said Humphrey, speaking at white heat, outraged at the supposed interference, and by this time beside himself with anger. "I am under the greatest obligations to Madame von Hannenbergh. She 'flatters my vanity,' you please to phrase it; put it as you may, she is fond of me in her way, and no dog would bite the hand which caressed it."

They parted, bitter in their hearts against each other. That evening Captain Newland left Dornton, too late repenting the mistake of his interference.

"A word repeated of this kind may cause great mischief," said Humphrey, relenting in his turn, but too proud to

make an apology when his wife's earliest benefactor came to say good-bye to him.

"I have not the habit of repeating what is not pleasant," answered the captain a little coldly.

"I ought to have known you are pretty well perfect."

"I don't deserve that compliment, but I have some discretion."

"It is I who am the fool; I am a fool to alienate the best friends I ever had," thought Humphrey, a little penitently, when he sat down after Newland's departure, wondering what the latter could have heard to make him think it so necessary to give his host a piece of his mind.

"It is 'much ado about nothing,' and I will not be weak enough to be bullied by other people into taking

*their* views instead of my own opinions on any subject," was the final result of his cogitations.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE next few days were wet ones at Dornton, and the wet penetrated the cottage, which had looked so pretty during the fine summer weather. "Madam," as the villagers called her, kept within doors, and it was noticed that the fine man-servant had disappeared.

"Madame von Hannenberg has made up her mind to leave us for the present," said Humphrey, standing with his back to the light and determining to address his wife on the subject a few

days afterwards. "She says she has been very lonely, and that you have neglected her; she complains that you have been very frigid in your manner to her lately, and she is not so rich as people suppose; it is difficult for her to keep up appearances. Will it not be well for you to ask her here for a short time before she leaves Dornton?"

"I cannot do that," answered Godwyn, trying to speak calmly, though her heart was hot within her at her husband's imputation. She knew that she had found it difficult, after the warnings of Captain Newland, to fall back into the old conventional tone with Olive; knew, too, that she had contented herself with receiving her coldly, remaining standing sometimes when Olive had paid her visits, hoping by that means to

shorten what had become a difficult ceremony. "I cannot ask her to stay here, if it were only for the sake of my children."

"Your children!" he said sneeringly. "Who is to harm such mere babies? Godwyn, I had thought better of you; I never could have believed that you would bore me with jealousy. You *cannot* ask her to stay here indeed! It seems to me you forget who is the master of this house when you take upon yourself to form harsh judgments of other women."

She had been speaking very quietly, but there was a sudden break in her voice as she answered,

"Don't let us quarrel, Humphrey—we have never quarrelled; don't let us be so silly as to make each other angry, and about a question like *this*. I suppose



it was nonsense for me to speak of the children when they are so little, but you know they are girls, and I cannot be too careful even in the first beginnings of things, and—and—you know how I hate scandal, but you must have heard the reports about her life abroad which have——”

The lump in her throat which would not let her trust her voice to any further utterance, stopped her abruptly in a speech which she feared to make uncharitable. The idea of her having cause to be jealous of anybody or anything, and that such an idea should be hinted to her by her own husband, seemed to her too humiliating.

“Godwyn,” he said, with his mouth set and his brows drawn together, “till now I always thought you were kindness personified. I would not have

believed it if any one had told me that *my* wife would be the one to repeat tales to the injury of another woman—tales received on mere hearsay. I suppose we have all faults enough, and I don't know that poor Olive is much worse than other people. 'Ah, it will be dreadful for me to go away,' she said to me only yesterday; and yet *you*—you who make such a profession of Christianity—would refuse her so poor a thing as the little kindness she asks for when she is feeling the desolate misery of her life. I suppose *you* never make mistakes—you, once the sweetest of all women, who have taken up with this Pharisaic pride, these stiff decorums and exactitudes!"

His blame was hard to bear. The fire flashed into her eyes, and the tears too, as she answered,

"You mistake. I wish to blame no one harshly, but I should be weak if I did not wish to stop an intimacy likely to call forth public comment. I don't say that poor Olive intends to do us any harm, but she makes us suffer—she disturbs our peace."

"It is your own jealousy that disturbs you," he muttered as he left her, and she did not try to justify herself. Not one word more could she have spoken, but something seemed to set her brain on fire. A wave of new pain was rolling in upon her. She suspected nothing that the world would have called evil—she was too pure-hearted; yet since Humphrey's manner had altered to her, it was true that she had become a different woman.

"I am afraid I worry you," she would say sometimes in the early days of her

married life, "with dancing and singing about the house, but I feel so light-hearted I cannot help it." *Now* the feet felt leaden-weighted which once had been so ready for their errands of mercy. The voice even was changed; the men in her Bible class could recognise the sad inflections in it without guessing the reason; it was as if God's hand, for some mysterious reason, was very heavy just now upon her.

Meanwhile Olive—in determining to leave a place which had become wearisome and repulsive to her, and in imagining herself injured for some cause which she would have found it difficult to define—had given reins to the miserable passions which had pursued her lately. Without her mother's voice to comfort her, and without a single good influence to control her, the woman who had

been spoiled from her childhood could not bear the innocent rivalry of Humphrey's wife.

"She is proud, self-righteous, intolerant," she would say to herself bitterly. "However disinterested she may appear to other people, her 'goody' ways are horrible to me. She has made a milk-sop of the pleasantest man I ever knew, and—— Ah well, it is plain enough that he wishes to have done with his old flirtation; but though I have determined to leave them—colourless as she is, with few perceptions—she shall acknowledge my power. Once I was his—once I had promised to belong to him, and if I accepted a different future in an hour of vertigo I have paid for it already in years of misery. They shall acknowledge that they cannot slight me

without paying the penalty for their daring."

She flattered herself that, to use her slang expression, she had kept herself "well in hand" before this. But now she was carried out of her artificial self; the real nature hidden so long asserting itself beneath the veneer of pretended refinement and outward respectability.

"I will teach them that a woman has power to strike, even when she has fallen so low that they think her beneath notice," she said, working herself up for the climax.

She was not afraid of Humphrey; she thought she had him in her power. There was a past, as she remembered, lying between them, and to a woman who knew how to use it effectively, dangerous use might be made of that

past. Hitherto she had attempted to use her power skilfully, with coolness, self-possession, and no imprudent revelation of any weakness of feeling on her own part, but now she was desperate.

She could not go on in her project of revenge without treading under foot the most sacred things. She must walk over a corpse to reach the man she meant to injure, but her better impulses were in abeyance for the time—she only listened to the voice of the tempter, and, suffering acutely herself, determined not again to go out into a world which she thought had become hollow and desolate to her without making somebody else suffer at least a portion of her own pain.

In a fit of excitement, and without waiting to think of what she was doing

any more than a murderess would have thought who grasped the throat of her victim for the gratification of her own passion, she sat down to write two letters.

One was anonymous, and—alas for Olive!—she had been trained in the school of a foreign diplomatist who had never been excelled in the fabrication of an anonymous letter and in the subtle insertion of the poisonous germs of suspicion in hearts which before had been confident and trusting! The anonymous composition was directed to Godwyn, and was worded,

“I have been thinking of you for a long time, and pitying you. I am old enough to be your mother, and though I hate to write anonymous letters, I feel as if I can keep silence no longer.



It has pained me for some time to know that your private affairs have become the talk of the neighbourhood. You are one of the many good women who have a blind trust in men, and it pains me inexpressibly to know how innocent, how transparently simple you are, and how miserably you are being duped by the woman who calls herself your friend and the man who has sworn to protect you.

“I know how confiding you naturally are, and how indignant you will be when you read this—how your first instinct will be to tear my letter into shreds and laugh my words to scorn. But would it not be wise before you condemn me to investigate matters for yourself? Prove my words false—you have the opportunity in your hands—

and then you will be in a position boldly to defy all calumnies.

“If you will go on Wednesday, at twelve o'clock in the morning, to the cottage which you helped to furnish so prettily, you will soon find out if you have occasion to laugh. You will tell me that you refuse to hide yourself, that there is nothing in the world which you would so much loathe as to play the part of a spy. I do not ask you to do anything of the sort; I only wish you to frustrate the machinations of a Jezebel who may otherwise make a ruin of your life. Walk straightforwardly, openly into the garden, and look about you without being blindfolded. Do you wonder who I am, and that I, being a stranger, care to write? I am only one of the many who respect you though they are un-

known to you, and who would help you to protect yourself before it is too late."

The other letter was worded as follows, and was addressed to Humphrey :—

"Strange things are being reported about me which are cruel and unfair, and for the sake of my own dignity I wish to say a word in self-defence. I can explain when I say farewell to you, but grant me this favour—let the farewell be at my own house. Your wife chills me ; she is forbidding to me, and you will understand that I can no longer ask for your advice, even in the most pressing exigencies, in the presence of one who evidently doubts me, and who has lately become slighting in her manner to me. Remember I have no

father, no husband, no male relation to consult in difficulties. If you are at all the man you used to be, you will not refuse to a suffering widow the last little favour which she asks. No, I think too well of you to believe that you will be deterred from performing a kind act from a foolish dread of mere appearances. Meet me to-morrow morning before our luncheon hour. My maid will be in the house to silence your English Mrs. Grundy. The little advice for which I shall have to ask you will not take more than a very few minutes, and I can ask it much better in a short interview than I can put it on paper.

“The once happy, though now most miserable,

“OLIVE VON HANNENBERG.”

She would not trust the letters to any messenger, but took the precaution to drive over to Knaresbury that she might post them the day before herself. Near Knaresbury she made the driver wait, having determined to walk to the post-office on foot. Her step, which on former occasions had been so languid, was now rapid and agitated ; the rapidity of motion seemed to be a trifling relief from the hell on earth which some of us make for ourselves when we yield to the violence of our passions, and which at that moment was raging like a fire in her bosom.

The talons of jealousy, like claws of iron, were tearing her heart and producing a devastation around her—a devastation in which all sense of pity or prudence, and all nobler feelings had fled. Memory recalled to her during that

hurried walk all the happy little family scenes which she had once or twice witnessed during her first visits to the villa. Her manner had remained unaltered, and not a muscle of her face had trembled when she had heard Humphrey addressing loving words to his wife, or had seen him with one of his little girls caressing his knee, and the other riding laughingly on his shoulders.

"People do not mind about being poor when they love each other with all their hearts," Godwyn had explained to her, with the happy light shining in her eyes and a tender admiring glance at Humphrey, on one of these occasions.

"To be sure they don't. Never you believe them when they come down upon you with the wretched old adage about

poverty in at the doors and the little god out at the windows," Humphrey had laughed in answer as he danced his little girl on his back.

And Olive had managed to smile also. She told herself that she had suffered cruelly, but that she had hitherto remained mistress of herself. She prided herself on having maintained all her presence of mind, though the looks and words of the husband and wife had contrasted with her own forlornness and impressed her painfully. But now this self-control was thrown to the winds. She had counted the cost of her proposed revenge, and nothing now could have persuaded her to forego it.

"How she loves him!" she said to herself when she recalled the expression of Godwyn's face as she had watched

Humphrey amusing himself with his children. "It made no difference to *her* when he lost all his money. I believe she loved him all the better for it. It was not the rich man whom she loved, the ambitious man, or the clever man. It was simply Humphrey. I believe his name was more harmonious to her than all the most celebrated names in the world. And all her cry was that she liked him to set a 'good' example. If he were to turn up his sleeves and go with begrimed face to help the common men at the mills she would love him all the more, if he were only in a namby-pamby way '*good—good!*' It will be as well to let her see how much his goodness is worth."

\* \* \* \*

She prepared for the interview in a



carefully-studied toilette of elegant confusion, the negligence of which made her more beautiful than usual. For one morning at least she had no occasion for the assistance of rouge. Her face was flushed, almost feverish, with the hectic colour of one who was maintaining a sudden and desperate resolution. She had counted on the impression which she hoped to produce on Humphrey, but her heart misgave her as to her power of accomplishing her purpose as soon as she heard the sound of his horse's hoofs on the gravel outside her garden. He came in with a thoughtful, preoccupied air.

"You see," he said in a constrained voice, "your letter was an order for me. I should not like to be uncourteous to a lady, but I am

doubtful about the wisdom of your sending it. That, after all, is *your* concern, not mine. If it is any comfort for you to discuss your plans with me, or for me to advise you about the future, I should not like to refuse to do so; but I think we might both have benefited by Godwyn's assistance."

"You are right; you are too courteous to be ungallant even to a woman you despise," she said, smiling a little bitterly; "I am afraid it is too late for me to try to make you think better of me. I have got a bad character, and naughtiness sticks like a burr you know. But as you mention Godwyn's name, I may as well tell you that one of the reasons I did not trouble her to come with you was because she has been look-

ing so poorly lately. How is she now?"

"She is pale and rather depressed, but better," he answered taking no notice of her bitterness.

"The change in her appearance has been sudden."

"She has never been strong."

"Oh, but this sudden depression which every one remarks—you would hide the truth from me, but I—I know it too well—this malady has been—*jealousy*."

"Who told you?" he asked, suddenly reddening, uncomfortable and stupefied at such an unexpected announcement.

"Who told me? Oh, I know they have been speaking against me," she answered, bursting into sudden tears—"I would rather have *died* than

expose myself to a word of scandal! Could you not remain a brother to me—I who was so friendless—without this cruel suspicion, this unnecessary gossip?”

She had been standing before him till now, her hands hanging down, but the hands were suddenly wrung together, and her sobs seemed as if they would suffocate her.

“Scold me if you think I deserve it,” she sobbed, noticing that he stood before her phlegmatic like a true Englishman at such an awkward crisis. “If I liked I could have justified myself and been reinstated in your good opinion long ago; but I have been so afraid—that you thought badly of me—for my marriage—that you thought ambition was my motive—or suspected me of a horrible

cupidity which would have been dreadful to me."

"I thought nothing of the kind. I think, *now* at least that I come to know more of you, that you are simply impulsive—that you act without calculation and have the nature of a child."

For very childish and very innocent she looked as she stood pleading with him, her small white hand with its cluster of rings now placed pleadingly on his.

"But you would not let me explain."

"Why should I have let you explain?" he answered, talking as he would to a child, and yet with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "I am not your guardian. An explanation between us would have been of no

earthly use. How, for instance, was I to believe everything without hearing the other side of the story?"

"Ah! there it is—you suspect—you mistrust. Tell me at least," she said, clasping her hands together again, "that you don't mistrust me."

"Really," he replied with more sarcasm, "it can be no duty of *mine* to investigate the past. I am not a lawyer or a father confessor."

"Ah, but the old associations!" she murmured. "I am so miserable. I think you are selfish, Humphrey. I do not so easily lose my interest in *my* friends. You know by what a strong impulse I was drawn to this rather dreary place; it was be-

cause I knew that I should find *one* sympathiser here who had been much more to me than an ordinary acquaintance."

Her voice faltered as she emphasized the last words, and saw that he was in a frame of mind quite the reverse of romantic, and was looking at her in strange, unanswering wonderment. She truly believed that she had been a resource to him in the weariness of his life, but had not sufficiently counted on the reaction of feeling which made him now, for Godwyn's sake, very glad to be rid of her. There was a curious expression of annoyance and perplexity on his face which made her realise for the first time that, even had he remained unmarried, she would never have been able to drag him for long as

another victim at her triumphal chariot.

"Indeed!" he answered drily, after an awkward pause, looking away from her, "I am sorry we did not have this explanation before. It would grieve me to think that you should have put yourself to any fatigue on my account."

"Don't be cross. Does Godwyn make you cross? You snubbed me and frowned upon me when first I came to this wilderness, though I came to do something to relieve the monotony of your life. Do you mean now to frown upon me again?"

The situation was peculiar. He began to wish himself well out of it, never having fathomed the character of this woman, and not being able to



guess what she was driving at. Mere childishness he tried to think it was, with a faint suspicion that the something which she called a heart, and which she wished him to believe had really, in spite of her faithlessness, been centred on him years before, was in reality a very ordinary, commonplace concern. But that the little busy brain, the plotting, manœuvring head was bent upon the destruction of all that he held most dear, and the foolish heart beating with the hope of outwitting him at that very moment, and frustrating his most cherished wishes, never even dawned upon him as a distant absurdity.

“Hang it! it is too ridiculous. I wish she would not speak in that strained and curious voice. What does

she expect of me?" he thought to himself, as she continued in pleading deprecation.

"You are cross still. I don't know if you have been falling out at home with other people, but it seems hard that it should be visited on poor innocent me."

"It is not my habit to fall out with 'people at home,'" he said in a stilted tone, and then, relaxing into a half-smile at the sight of the grief for which there seemed to be so inadequate a reason. "What is it we can do for you? It shall never be said that at Dornton we were 'cross' or inhospitable."

"I ask you to give me advice, and you don't even give me one little kindly, encouraging smile."

"Well, if there is anything wrong,

I advise you to square up accounts. If I can help you, of course——”

“Ah, think what it has been to have my sunshine darkened—to have to wrench my heart from all that I cared for once—to look forward to my black future, to loneliness and dreariness to the close of my days,” and then she burst again into sobs, which he could not suspect were caused more by temper and mortification than any depth of feeling.

An awkward silence followed. Again he had the Englishman's longing to get away; but the more kindly feeling conquered when she—so apparently limp and helpless—continued in broken accents, and looking at him with the bright drops hanging on her drooping lashes,

"Humphrey, can you not help me at least from destroying myself—from being worn out by these vain regrets—from sinking into an early grave? You have grown wise and good, and I ask you for your friendship. Ah, a few years ago we did not talk so coldly, but—let me still be your friend—let me think that, whatever happens—you—you will give me your advice. I think sometimes that if *one* person in the world believed in me I should be a better woman."

The silence lengthened painfully, and then he said with an effort,

"Lives are enlarged sometimes by sorrow as well as by happiness. I am sure I have heard that somewhere. I think my wife would say it. But, if you wish to do so, you

may look on me, as you said just now, in the light of a protecting brother or a helpful friend. You will make another marriage some day, and then you may write and tell us all about it."

"What will you tell your wife?"

"Nothing but the truth. She used to have an affection for you, and I am sure you attach too much consequence to the idea of her being jealous of you."

He brought out the words with an effort. The whole conversation was very obnoxious to him.

"Will you persuade her to come and see me and to think better of me?" continued Olive, speaking as humbly as if indeed she had adopted the *rôle* of a spoiled and penitent child.

"I will see to it," he answered a little irritably. "Perhaps it will look the better for you if she comes to visit you here. She shall accompany me herself."

"Is that to be a compact?"

"Yes," he replied, "I will try. When I promise a thing I will carry it out."

"Your hand upon it."

"All right!" he said laconically.

They had not yet shaken hands, but he gave her his readily, a little surprised when she continued—

"There—in the chivalrous attitude!"

"What a fancy! Am I to make a salaam as if you were a queen and I a courtier at your feet?" he answered, laughing aloud for the first time during the interview.

"Are we not making a treaty? You are to be my knight—my brother! I am to write to you, according to our compact, when I want somebody to help me to do what is right or to redress my wrongs. If I were one of the grand ladies of the Middle Ages I would say, 'Rise up, Sir Knight!'"

"Well," he answered, still smiling at the supposed childish fancy, and bending his knee, half ashamed at trying to humour her in this new absurdity, whilst yet the vagary pleased him better than the tragedy which she had just been acting!

Her head almost touched his; she touched him with her scented hair; she held him by the hand.

"Rise up, Sir Knight!" she said in another moment.

His back was to the window; the hand of the clock pointed to the hour of twelve, and at the instant when she raised him up a stifled groan rather than a cry was heard amongst the laurel-bushes in the garden.

Both started and looked round.

"It is early for an owl—do you remember how frightened your wife used to be of owls?—perhaps it is a ghost," said Olive, laughing loudly.

"You are right to be sarcastic," he answered with a quick revulsion of feeling, noticing the dissonant laugh and the strange expression of her face. "It is not the first time I have been the victim of your raillery. Your grief is only counterfeit, and you are delaying me. I have other more important duties, and you must let me go," he continued, as the whole



scene had begun to rouse in him an indescribable feeling of loathing and irritation.

“Go!” she cried, suddenly throwing off the mask with almost an air of triumph, her little laughs full of coquetry and her assumed desire for sympathy no longer necessary—“go, by all means, and find my rival. Ah, you are like all the men! They console themselves quickly, and each woman in turn is a fool to believe in their easily-broken promises. Godwyn will *never* believe in you again; she is no longer yours. That sound which puzzled you so much just now when you were bending in that ridiculous attitude was——”

“Well?” he asked impatiently, though her passionately sneering words made him wince and turn pale. “Now I

come to think of it, it *was* a ridiculous attitude; you do well to remind me of it, but it was only a game, after all, worthy of French people. What had that to do with the mysterious sounds in your garden? Why drag my wife's name into the matter?"

"Why indeed! She was always a prude whose name might not be mentioned, like Cæsar's wife, so immeasurably above the rest of her sex! Things might go far to kill her, for instance, which might seem nothing to ordinary mortals like ourselves," she answered, strung into a higher pitch of passion by the scornful and superior tone which he adopted to her. "The cry was only a little stifled one like that which might come from a wounded bird, but coming from *Godwyn*, you know, with her absurd notions about

some things, it *might* mean a *broken heart* !”

“Nonsense !” he cried, as her meaning dawned upon him, starting as if he had been touched by naked steel. “Nonsense !” he added—“*incredible nonsense* !” in the tone in which, had she been a man, he would have said in his desperation, “You lie !”

“No, it is not nonsense. It is I who have planned it. You have both of you mocked at me and made light of me in your different ways, and now you have fallen into my easily-contrived snare. I pity Godwyn much more than I pity *you*, for it was you with your false pretences who deserved to be punished. I know your wife; you have lost her. You hated and despised me; you were polite to me in her presence just sufficiently to

make her jealous, but while you worshipped the ground she trod on, you have always *really* looked down upon me! If you suffer for your own foolishness you have brought it on yourself."

This flow of words, which came from her lips like scalding water from some boiling source—this implacable fury which so surprised him—for a few moments deprived him of speech, and then the wicked woman had her revenge indeed, for never had his manhood been so shaken.

What had happened was so entirely unexpected and unusual, so contrary to the accustomed notions of the civilisation of the nineteenth century, that it was not wonderful if his self-control deserted him in the emergency. As he gazed at Olive

with astonishment in powerless indignation, and with the veins about his temples swollen like whipcords, he felt himself again wishing that she were a man that he might fell her to the ground.

"He looked ashen grey and as if he had grown quite old," she said to herself afterwards, shuddering too late as she recalled the mischief she had done.

"*We* never hated you; it is you who have hated yourself, and who have been your own worst enemy," he said in a voice which seemed to come from some one else, as soon as he recovered his power of speech. "And yet it is common to all humanity to hate falsehood, treachery, and double-dealing—a foul heart with a fair face. God forgive you! but *I* shall do no

more to rescue you from your reckless, pestilential life! Who would have thought that you could have had the heart to plan it, with your hands looking as innocent and white as if they were a babe's, and yet what evil they have done! You may go scot-free—the law cannot touch you, yet Heaven knows you have committed a crime far viler and more horrible than that for which some miserable wretch is wearing out her life in penal servitude. Yes, *you*, you will go and star it in some place of fashion with no punishment that man can give you, and only admiration for your beauty—you who have committed a moral murder, worse than the murder of those who kill the body!"

It was the raving of a madman.

He hardly recognised it as coming from himself—he whose very weakness had arisen from an excess of gallantry.

## CHAPTER VII.

“IT will take a violent shock to open her eyes, the poor innocent, unsuspecting thing!” some of the people in the neighbourhood of Dornton had prophesied for weeks past, with tongues wagging as they had not wagged for years on the state of domestic affairs at the villa.

A few of the older matrons had ventured upon mild remonstrances and delicately-hinted expressions of sympathy lately, when they had visited Godwyn and chanced to find her alone. But such



an experiment was never repeated. For the indignation which had flashed from Mrs. Bardsley's eyes, and the loyal defence which she took upon herself to make for any course of conduct which her husband thought fit to adopt, had confounded these well-meaning women, and offended them not a little.

"Some day or other," they said in whispers amongst themselves, "Mrs. Bardsley would be brought face to face with a state of things which would astonish her," and which would be the direct sequence of events which, had she been a person of the most ordinary common sense, "she might have seen to have been prepared under her very nose!"

People had given her meaning glances, and Godwyn had become white, trembling and smitten by the thought of their uncalled-for cruelty and the suspicions

which she hated them for entertaining. For whilst they were remarking to each other, "If her eyes are not opened now no one will have any pity for her," they did not sufficiently count on the fact that there was one social misdemeanour which had hitherto been quite unintelligible to Godwyn Bardsley.

Before the arrival of Olive von Hannen-berg, Godwyn had never been able to understand how any grown woman, supposed to have some self-respect, would go to the extent of serious flirtation with a married man. She had heard that there were some grown women who could make themselves absurd by "aping girlhood," and pretending that their "neighbours' husbands could be their lovers." But she had believed in this accusation about as much as she believed in the common report that many

English ladies drank Eau-de-Cologne, brandy, or chloral in secret. If she had ever happened to take up one of those unwholesome novels whose writers seemed to have a morbid love for unhealthy topics, she had flung the book down with horror before she had read much of it, remarking, as usual, that she "did not believe it."

Soon after the arrival of her old acquaintance, Olive's manner and Olive's vanity had appeared ridiculous to her, but she had blamed the influence of the worst sort of French and German society rather than Olive's heart. And though her wonder and pain had increased when Madame von Hannenberg sought for her husband's sympathy rather than for hers, she never for one moment supposed that Humphrey would pay attention to ad-

vances which had roused her own surprise and indignation.

"The position is so—so strange—the world is hard, and will interpret it in its own way. But oh, how wicked these people must be themselves to have such evil thoughts in their hearts and to have suspicions of *my Humphrey!*" she would think, her cheeks mantling higher and higher with honest blushes as she made up her mind to set her teeth as if she were a man, shut her eyes, and bear what was awkward and disagreeable, but still—for a time—she supposed inevitable.

She could scarcely have explained herself how—when she received the letter—she attached more importance to it than she would have done had not these sinister prophecies reached her ears.

The letter itself, as she was ready to

reason, should have had no possible power to affect her. Yet it might almost have seemed as if it were alive like a poisonous serpent that had actually stung her; such a sickly chill did it send through her veins, such a strange shiver of anguish, that her face, which had been flushed as she opened it, became as suddenly blanched, and her slender figure swayed with the intensity of the shock.

“How foolish I am!” she said, placing her hand on her heart, as if by its pressure she could deaden the vibrations. “Am I not sure of Humphrey’s affection? Good heavens! what did it mean? Why should she let this poisonous letter sting her?” She could not believe in the faintest taint of impurity or double dealing in her beloved—his soul was white as her own—unsullied as hers

was by *that* form of human frailty, and yet it was difficult for her to account to herself for this sudden shock, which seemed to make the very springs of her being stand still. One of her little girls was with her, and her fingers had tightened convulsively on the child's tender hand in that moment of intense pain.

"Mamma dear, you hurt me, and why are you trembling?" cried the little one, astonished, and the cry recalled Godwyn to herself.

"It is some wicked deception, and it must be my duty to *prove it untrue*. I have been in a sort of way challenged to prove it," she thought, as her bent figure grew straight again and she opened one of the windows and leant out of it like one being suffocated. There were drops of perspiration on

her forehead, and that trembling of horror and disgust was still upon her.

“For the children’s sake these cruel liars shall be put to silence for ever! I did not see how I could help before, but they have given me some power of helping *now*. I will summon strength to go to the cottage, and *afterwards*, when the evening comes, I will show Humphrey the letter. We two will laugh over it and tear it in pieces! Together we will concoct some good plan for exposing such falseness!”

“Nothing shall ever part us two!” she thought to herself, as, thickly veiled, she set out for her expedition, unable to account, except on the score of illness, for the undefinable sensation which was oppressing her still as with a mysterious terror. “It is just because I am, as

the doctor told me a week ago, so feeble, that I am again as ridiculously silly as I used to be when a child, haunted by the spiritual shape of some mighty sorrow which did not exist. It is just as unreal now as it used to be *then*, but just as ghastly and over-powering," she thought, trying to scold herself into common sense as she walked on determinately towards the cottage. Could she be so ungrateful, so mean, as to distrust Humphrey? Oh no, she was going to clear him. Her part had been to thank God for so dear a companion through all these years. Something in her present state of spiritual and mental confusion seemed to recall that state of childish suffering from which Humphrey had rescued her as a boy. She had felt *then* as if she were going



wild; she felt in some incomprehensible way, and very oddly, a little like it now. But the vision which rose before her eyes of the boyish face and curly hair and the sound of the merry, ringing laugh, which seemed to ring once more in her ears, urged her on to the mission which was so distasteful to her—where she had been summoned—into that garden.

“Oh, my love, my love!” her heart seemed to cry, “how could they doubt you? As if I could let any terrible mistake come between us—as if I could let them speak against you! If we could only get away together from these cruel tongues, as we used to when we were boy and girl, and I could feel your protecting hand holding mine tight as you used to hold it then—before we knew anything about the

wickedness in this world—I should never be afraid of anything!”

The air began to revive her. She looked round—at the green of the trees and the blue sky over her head—and felt as if God's world was getting purer and healthier again. She could not go into the house, but she walked as bravely as possible in at the garden, and conquered the choking sensation in her throat.

The ordeal was something like having a tooth drawn, but—not knowing that she had anything more terrible to expect—she reminded herself that it would be over quickly enough and that she could go through it, much as she disliked it, for Humphrey's sake. Should Madame von Hannenbergh catch sight of her from the windows, and wonder at her for being there, she had made

up her mind to tell her all the truth.

Her heart beat a little quickly as she stood amongst some thickly-planted bushes, with piles after piles of translucent leaves glowing in the sun like flakes of gold. Even in that moment of vexation and anxiety, with the dominant wish to get away from the place, she could not help remarking what a beautiful morning it was, and what streaks of topaz light flashed between the leaves of the trees and lit up the grass and the gravel path.

One of the French windows, which Olive had ordered to be made when her pretty residence had been fitted up for her, was purposely left open, and Mrs. Bardsley could not help noticing, as she drew near it, that the rose-coloured blind had been drawn up, and that she could see

into the room without being seen herself owing to the thickness of the bushes.

For one moment she was able to wonder at the ambush, which was not of her own preparing, but which had been prepared for her; at the next she was too paralysed with fear to be able to move. And then she had no choice but to stand with her hands wrung together and her breath held in for a period which seemed to her strained and shuddering mind to be a terrible length of time, till—seeing as plainly as it was possible to see with the hot blood surging, as it were, to her poor bewildered brain, and a cloud, which seemed half to blind her, coming before her eyes—she beheld to her misery a sight which she would

have called incredible had not she herself been there to witness it.

She saw and could reason on nothing more. The strange cloud, to be accounted for by no physical laws, which made everything look as if it were set on fire, was blotting out the outlines of the trees and gravel paths as she stumbled out of Olive's grounds and made her way by an effort of will into the public road, scarcely heeding where she went.

"Mademoiselle je le veux" somebody had called her playfully when she was young, and that energy of character seemed to come to her assistance now, even when she was driven to desperation, enabling her to conquer her faintness and escape from the notice of strangers. The mere

effort of motion was as terrible to her at that moment as that of one who could not swim, and who was wading in deepening waters. There was a beating at her temples now as well as at her heart; but she drew down her veil to hide the deadly pallor which she knew was coming over her, and composed her features to look as usual if she should happen to meet a friend, though all the time she felt as if she had been struck with a mortal blow, and was creeping away like some agonised dumb animal to hide her wound and die.

Once or twice she stopped herself and tried to steady her nerves, wondering if she were the victim of some horrible nightmare, or if she were going idiotic.

There was an idiot man who wandered

about begging in the neighbourhood of Knaresbury in whose story she had always taken a special interest. When he was a boy of fifteen this poor fellow had left his home for a few days in search of work, and had returned to find that there had been a fire in the village in which he lived. The fire had spread in the night from one thatched cottage to another, and though most of the inmates had been saved, there had been no one to remember—till too late—the danger to which his widowed mother and little sister were exposed, and as neither of them had screamed for help or appeared at the window, it was supposed that they had been suffocated by the smoke. When the poor boy returned and found all that he loved on earth vanished, and the little house reduced to a heap of

ashes, he fled with a wild cry from those who would comfort him—a bitter cry of desolation—"There is no good God." Ever since in his gibberings and chatterings he had repeated that one sentence plainly, making the blood freeze of those who heard him.

And Godwyn, who had often scolded the idle children who tormented him, hooting and pelting the poor creature with stones, had found all her efforts useless when she attempted to persuade him to enter a church.

In her present bewilderment of mind, she seemed to confuse her own story with that of this poor lad. The whole universe seemed to be suddenly reduced to a ghastly heap of ashes; the solid earth seemed to be failing beneath her feet. Now that Humphrey had



deserted her, everything seemed to be hollow and unreal—everything but the keen sense of desolation which was driving her to desperation.

Often and deeply had she supped of sorrow before, but never till now did she seem to have sounded the depths of it.

It was, in fact, the very sharpest trial of all—the temptation to believe in the baseness of her fellow-creatures—which was assailing her now. It is better to lose some games than to win them; better to be one of the few hearts which are fused into gold in the cauldron of suffering than to be without a definite conviction which can keep a man or woman patient even when mortally hit, because of a firm belief in the great law of love.

Hitherto she had held firmly to that

law of love, but now she felt as if no dawn could ever break for her in this world which could make her feel young again before her youth was gone, or take the bitterness away. Friendship and truthfulness seemed to be all a cheat, smiles a mockery, and kindness barrenness. In the delirium which had come over her, and which was partly the result of the sudden mental shock, and partly owing to the weak state of her physical health, it seemed as if the intervening years had been erased from her recollection. She had forgotten the existence of her children, and could only remember her early coming to Dornton with the miserable episode which appeared to have ended her story. It was as if Humphrey's former love seemed to have left a stain upon her, and she wished to revenge

herself by her contempt! She had given herself, she thought, too easily to him without allowing him to have a sense of conquest or of triumph.

"I might have known that my first impressions as a girl were right—that he always loved *her*, and had only a cold esteem for me," she thought, as she dragged her weary limbs onwards, past the beach and the well-known cliffs, going she scarcely knew whither.

The recollection of a fault could have made her bear her suffering in that fevered state of mind more patiently. If it would not have reconciled her to her loss, she could still have believed in Divine justice. But in the frenzy for which she was scarcely accountable, even her Christianity seemed for a time to have deserted her.

“Ah, what have I done that he should rend my heart? Did I not love him better than all the world? Did I give him any cause for a single day to doubt of my entire devotion to him? Was it of any use all my trying to be patient and good? Did I not try to be unselfish in receiving this woman? And directly he has seen her again he has forgotten everything about *me*; whilst she—was she less than human that in stealing *his* heart it should be nothing to her that mine could be broken? Oh, if I had only a mother that I might weep upon her breast—some one who would pity me and hide me from the sight of every one! Why should I suffer so much?” she moaned to herself, shuddering visibly as she walked; her fearless eyes sinking for the first time shamed

to the ground. "I feel as if I were the toy of some blind, inscrutable power—as if I had been deceived by an angel of light. Was I not happy enough when I was married? Did I not believe in the blessings which would result from my prayers—in the sincerity of Humphrey's promises, and in the candour of his emotions?"

Why was she offered in a sort of holocaust for other people's sins in an agony like this? The night grew thick around her—the mystery of her destiny terrified, and her heart was full of bitterness. Self-conquest had always hitherto seemed to her to be possible, but now nature, so long subdued, had become a fearful antagonist to be wrestled with. Tormenting spirits seemed to be whispering in her

ear as these doubting thoughts deprived her of her only source of comfort. She seemed to be forgotten by God, as well as by the human friends who had loved her. Life and death had become a strange bewildering puzzle; life, perhaps, worse than death, so that she felt as if it mattered little what might become of her.

My readers, there may be some of you who will accuse me of exaggeration, but there are others to whom my words may be the mere ghost of the reality, and who may know something of that cry of desolation echoed by suffering humanity, and which was uttered even by the Sinless One in a moment of acutest agony. But it is better that I should not attempt to describe any more. For there are paroxysms of feeling which transcend

the power of language, and the tearless anguish of which no one knows but He who made us can only be dimly shadowed forth in words.

## CHAPTER VIII.

SCARCELY knowing where she was going, hurried on by a sort of blind instinct, Godwyn followed the line of the coast as she had sometimes followed it in her girlish wanderings, or the merry excursions of her early married life. Weak as she was, the violence of her grief had given her a transient and unnatural strength. As the afternoon wore on she was still walking, with blistered feet and aching limbs, finding the route, more by the aid of



memory than sight, to a little deserted beach, where enclosed by a precipitous part of the cliff, and with waves breaking over the bleak sandy flats of the less verdant and most desolate part of that shore, she had once noticed two poverty-stricken cottages, in one of which she thought it possible she might now find a refuge. But her brief strength seemed to have deserted her; reaction was commencing already, and in her fagged and exhausted condition it seemed impossible that she could reach it.

She dragged herself along—sometimes sitting down to rest for a moment on the grass, which was becoming damp with the evening dew. The cold of the early night, and the pitiless sting of the wind from the sea, struck upon her, making her shiver in the thin

clothing which she had worn in the morning. The last few yards seemed worse than all the journey—she felt it would be impossible for her to traverse them; she must lie on the cliff throughout the night exposed to the wind and dew. But, with a sudden effort of strength, she pulled a stick from one of the rotten branches of a weather-beaten tree, and, using it to aid her faltering steps, limped along by slow degrees, sometimes falling as she walked.

There was a roar as of voices in her ears, as at last she sank almost past the power of speech on the threshold of one of the cottages.

“Take me in, if you can, for the night. I have money—I will pay you well. I am ill—I cannot go any

farther," was all she could falter in explanation.

And though the shock-headed, black-eyed woman—whose dirty children had been clinging to her skirts, and whom Godwyn knew to be a widow when she had visited her two years before—was somewhat surprised at the gentle lady's imperious gestures, her kindly sympathies were aroused, and with the true hospitality of the poor she never dreamed of denying her a welcome. Such a night's lodging as she had to offer was willingly tendered to the stranger; and if the one bedroom, with its ramshackle door, which did not shut out the suffocating smoke from the peat fire burning beneath a primitive chimney in the adjacent kitchen, and the dirty mattress, of which she deprived herself, spread out on

the stone floor, proved bad accommodation, it was at least the widow's best.

The woman was somewhat disturbed in her mind, when, next morning, she saw plainly that her unexpected visitor was by no means in a proper condition to be moved. She pestered Godwyn with questions as to whether she lived at Dornton or Knaresbury? who her friends were? and should she send for them?—questions to which Godwyn only answered by a feeble shake of the head. Her well meaning hostess sorely perplexed, did her best to silence the noise of her children and to keep back the incursions of intruding cocks and hens, which had a habit of strutting about the bedroom, with their attendant chickens, whilst a sow with a litter

of pigs could with difficulty be beaten out of the kitchen. Perhaps the stifling clouds of the peat smoke caused the headache which seemed to pound Godwyn's brain as with pestle and mortar; perhaps it was the absence of sufficient blankets which made her feel so acutely the wind and rain which penetrated through the crannies of the broken window! Her thoughts had merged into chaos; she had no more power now for that struggle of feeling and for that element of love mixing with bitterest reflection which often produces many a final rupture. Humphrey and everything belonging to her past history were blotted out in merciful oblivion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile her anxious friends at Dornton were scouring the country

to find her. Humphrey, regardless of all appearances, and no longer shrinking from the fear of exposure, had set the local machinery at work to try and find his missing wife. Night and day they had searched for her, and terrible surmises were made. Some of the men spoke beneath their breath of the necessity for dragging the adjacent river. But Humphrey passionately cast aside the suggestion.

"No, she would do nothing foolish or desperate," he reminded himself. "She was a clear-headed, highly-principled woman, and no fate that involved the slightest ignominy could sully the nobility of Godwyn!" The ignominy was all his own, and he felt powerless to answer his uncle, when, with tears oozing with difficulty from the eyes dimmed with old age, the elder

Mr. Bardsley stammered out his fears and his complainings.

It fell to Carslake's wife to find the lady who had effected so great a reformation in her husband's character. It was she alone who suddenly thought of the little cottages on the distant beach, which, on account of the slight attraction offered by the more desolate scenery, were so seldom visited by picnic parties or tourists in search of beauty. There was no candle in the lonely cottage when Keziah Carslake visited it, but the moon made a faint cold glimmer on the floor close to the mattress on which Godwyn was lying, and cast a light on the pale, pinched mouth and face, from which all the dimples had fled. Had Godwyn's faculties not deserted her she would have started up and tried to turn her

back to the door with the instinct of hiding from one of her husband's messengers; but, as it was, she did not hear the quick step on the threshold, nor the anxious inquiries which were made about her, in a shaky voice, by the apple-cheeked young woman, whose every sentence was interrupted by the necessity of wiping her eyes. Once, when she knelt down and called loudly into Godwyn's ears, a quiver seemed to pass through the exhausted frame, and the lips moved, but without making any articulate sound.

"I'll watch with 'er as long as is needed; it 'ull be ended one way or another with her soon, pore leddy, and so good as she's been to all on us," sobbed Keziah, now fairly breaking down, as, with her maternal sympathies roused, she hastened to light a dip



candle and to give instructions to the frightened cottager to run as quickly as possible for the nearest doctor. Then, kneeling down again, she tried to chafe the cold hands and to pour a little of the milk, which it had been easy for her to warm over the peat fire in the neighbouring kitchen, down the dry throat of the sufferer, looking eagerly as she did so to see if any expression of intelligence came into the eyes, which had seemed to be staring at vacancy, and which still remained cloudy and bewildered.

That night in the poverty-stricken cottage there was a fight for a gentle woman's life, and another little life, that had been flickering on the threshold of existence, struggled into being with no want of kindly attention on the part of the rough hostess and

anxious doctor, although the unknown lady had come like a waif in the darkness, and Keziah, in her excitement, had no time at first to tell the intruder's name.

"It be a boy, baint it? and him as has only wenches—the very light as it 'ud be for the gen'l'man's eyes," cried Keziah unintelligibly, as she held the little bundle, wrapped in a flannel petticoat, close to the smoky fire. "Oh deary, deary me, to think it should all come round in this queer sort of a takin'!"

For some time Godwyn hung between life and death. The flame of life had sunk so low that only the gentle vitalising joy of the little infant's cry revived it. Her eyes, which, as Keziah remarked, had been looking "for all the world like the eyes of a

corpse," first showed a change by a twitching of the eyelids, and then a low strange smile, as if from the depths of pain, spread slowly over her face, and as they bent down to listen they heard her say,

"Give me my child!"

"Yes, that's right and natural," said the parish doctor bluntly; "it's as fine a boy as you wish to see, and it's dying for want of the proper nourishment."

They put her babe in her arms, and directly she touched it a brightness flashed into her dull eyes like the glint on the blade of a steel knife. The touch seemed to breathe a sacred charm over her disordered senses, and she burst into a passion of tears, upbraiding herself for her unmotherly forgetfulness.

"Let her cry; it will do her good," said the parish doctor, whose device had accomplished just what he desired.

And cry she did almost continuously for several hours, while memory—that memory which just then seemed to her the cruellest gift ever granted—by slow degrees returned to her.

"Anything will be better than that horrible stupor," the doctor had said to the frightened women, who continued to watch her pitifully, and to let her grief expend itself at will. The silence was only broken by the occasional wail of the infant, or the click caused by the old pendulum which swung to and fro, fro and to, below the antiquated clock, as if in mockery of human sorrow.

When the doctor came again Keziah whispered,

"May I giv' it 'er yet?"

"Not suddenly," he answered, "by slow degrees. You must beat about the bush before you give it her."

But "beating about the bush" did not come naturally to Keziah. Her only notion of accomplishing it, in this case, was by making some rather uncouth reflections on the "goings on" of her husband's master—reflections which had much the same effect upon Mrs. Bardsley as violent personal abuse would have upon a man who pretended to be dead—causing him suddenly to sit upright.

"Hush, you forget yourself!" she said, shocked at Keziah's impertinence. "I wish if you had those sort of things to say about my husband you would say them to somebody else," she added with the first sign of returning colour.

"Or do not speak of him at all, if you have nothing wiser to say."

She had determined never to hear a word against Humphrey. He was her husband still, and it was her duty to exonerate him.

"But, 'm, I must speak of 'im," said Keziah, anxious to justify herself. "Whatever else is I to do with the letter which he giv' me to carry to ye a-lying in my pocket?"

"He entrusted you with a letter, and you have been keeping it back from me till now. That is why he did not come himself. Ah, I see it all now; you are a shocking bungler, Keziah!" said Godwyn, trying to force one of her bitter heart-wrung smiles, but ending her speech with trembling lips, and with eyes full of tears.

For a moment, as she read the letter, she seemed to be again beneath the deep waters, with the floods going over her. It ran as thus :—

“I know by this time how it is. You have fallen into a snare which was laid on purpose to entrap you—a fiendish snare, though she who laid it scarcely thought it could have such disastrous consequences. You might have trusted me a little more; you might have acted with less precipitation. But I can only suppose you yielded to an overmastering impulse, and that you tried to prove, by hiding yourself from me, the horror you had conceived of me and of my conduct. Harsh and sudden as your decision seems to be, *in some respects* I have deserved it. I acquiesce in it; it is the only way in

which I can hope to expiate my culpable weakness. *You* shall not be driven from your home. I will abide your sentence. I go away to-night an exile, unworthy of so noble a heart as yours. God bless you, dearest. I shall remain away from you till not a shadow of mistrust can intervene between us. I have made every plan for your comfort during my absence. You know almost as much about business matters as I do, and I have now a skilful manager whom I can trust. Return and watch over my house—cheer my almost broken-hearted uncle. You may stop the scandal even now by returning as quickly as possible. I shall never lose sight of you, though you may not be able to hear of my whereabouts. Perhaps it is better that you should forget me. Once more, God bless you !”



The conflicting feelings with which she had had to wrestle overwhelmed her again as she read this letter. On the one hand Humphrey was restored to her. He was once more her honoured husband, and she could replace him on his pedestal enshrined in her heart. All the ignoble suffering for his sake, in which her courage and pride had been broken, as if on the wheel, was past and done away with. But on the other hand he had left her. Would he perform his threat? Would he not relent if she wrote to him before he put the seas between them? and would not her dream of sweet companionship—of walking hand in hand together with him in a life of moral and spiritual union, through the undreaded grave to the brighter life beyond—be yet fulfilled in spite of all that had happened?

And then she remembered that she *could* not write—that the address was kept back from her—and she fell back fainting; but when she recovered from the fainting fit she tried to deceive honest Keziah by cheerful words while her face was still racked with woe, and her heart tortured with a suffering which she tried to hide, and which could not find relief in tears.

“Let us go back to Dornton,” she said to Mrs. Carslake in a keener, sharper, and more ringing tone than she had used throughout her illness. “I am wearying to be moved as soon as possible. Oh no, it will not hurt me—it will hurt me far more to keep me lying here! My poor uncle will want me; he is not well enough to fetch me—and—my husband you know

—has gone away—for a little while—  
they say—it was necessary, and I  
must have patience—it will be selfish of  
me—to hurry his return.”

And although this was spoken with  
sharp catchings of the breath, and with  
the unnatural glitter still in the aching  
eyes, it answered its purpose in bewildering  
her faithful attendant, and in hiding  
from her the knowledge of the sharpness  
and bitterness of the ordeal through  
which Godwyn then was passing.

## CHAPTER IX.

ALTHOUGH the awakening had come suddenly to Humphrey, and he had been so startled out of his usual easy-going complacency as to retort fiercely and contemptuously, without a vestige of his usual courtesy, on the woman who, to gratify her feelings of pique, had attempted to play so mean and wicked a trick upon him, yet he could not at first believe that he should have cause to dread any serious consequences.

“I have been a fool to humour her

whims, but I can afford to defy her and let her do her worst; she will never be able to shake my wife in her allegiance to me," he thought, as he walked home in a state of angry ferment, scarcely knowing whether to be most indignant with this woman, who had proved herself to be such an avenging Astræa, or with his own stupidity. He remembered how his self-control had been almost exhausted during the interview, and how he had hurled words at her as if he had been forgetful of her sex. Now that the reaction had come he felt how useless had been his passion, but his self-respect was wounded, and he shrank from meeting Godwyn. His first thought had been to seek his wife and explain all to her without delay, making her believe how truly and how tenderly he had always loved

her. But as he neared home his footsteps slackened, and he began to argue with himself. Memory helped him, bringing out clearly and distinctly, like fire bringing out secret writing, every snare which an unscrupulous schemer had laid to entrap him.

"I have been a fool and nothing more ; why should I bring up the miserable subject between myself and my wife again?" he thought, half inclined to retrace his steps. "Why should I stoop to vindicate myself from accusations which are utterly senseless?" For, with Olive's words still ringing in his ears, he felt a sort of shame of meeting Godwyn—a shame which was new to him as an honest and an honourable man. "It is surely not possible that any real harm can come of all this nonsense," he thought in this reaction of feeling, as

he quickened his walk, pricked and tortured by the remembrance of his own culpable weakness. It was not possible that just because a silly, half-educated woman—whose faculties for mischief had been developed by the artificial habits which she had contracted at foreign watering-places, whose better impulses had been stifled in moral atmospheres which were as heated and poisonous as overcrowded, gaslit theatres, and whose mind had been fed on sensational French novels—chose to plan a melodramatic sort of revenge in which she sacrificed to her momentary passion all ideas of propriety, therefore she should have power to injure *his wife*, who was raised so immensely above her.

“I defy her; let her do her worst,” he repeated to himself again, as if the

reiteration of his defiance could make conviction stronger.

And yet mixed up with his disgust at Olive's unseemly conduct, and with that other ingredient of disgust at his own easiness of temperament, came the remembrance which he could not shake off of the groan which was said to be his wife's.

The cry of the poor injured soul seemed to have reached his heart, and agonised it. And yet after all, perhaps, the whole thing was only a practical joke, and he—who had the greatest possible objection to what is called a scene—would willingly have persuaded himself that it was so. He walked to and fro on the lonely road, wincing at the difficulty of convincing himself that the thing was not real, and that a trick had *not* been played upon him



which had shocked and wounded his wife, and desecrated everything dear and holy associated with the name of home. He, too, trembled as he walked, and the familiar objects were a trifle indistinct before his eyes; yet he tried to think that he was not, after all, suffering from a blow which had gone to his heart and spilled his warmest blood.

The instinctive dread of something terrible which had made him use such violent language came upon him again in full force as he reached the door of the villa. He recognised then the utter absurdity of hoping to shake off the waking nightmare, or to calm his thoughts by pacing up and down in the fresh air, and he feared to inform himself of the truth by hurrying in as he had first intended. He heard the lunch-

bell ring for the third time as he was still aimlessly wandering about, and hesitating to return under circumstances which had become so miserable. The hour of penitence and of grief had seemed to have come upon *him* as well as upon Madame von Hannenberg, and his conscience reproached him for having weakly yielded to his old languid love of ease and amusement in falling so readily into a ridiculous pitfall.

"Godwyn may not be able to look upon me without loathing, if it is possible that she still believes in that wretched scene," he thought with pale austerity at the recollection of the wicked interference which, because his eyes had not been sufficiently open, had taken place between them.

It never struck him that, while he had thought he was acquainted with

everything that was going on, all the time he might have been stone-blind as to what his wife had really been suffering. But a new and suddenly painful emotion flitted rapidly across his already agitated face when he heard from the servant that not only had her mistress gone out apparently rather unwell that morning, but that she had not returned.

It was much past the usual lunch hour. The neatness and brightness of everything on the table, from the snow-white cover to the brilliant glass and spoons—all speaking of the careful management and dexterous lighthandedness of the gentle uncomplaining wife, who, in spite of her own failing health and the heavy pressure of domestic cares on her delicate shoulders, had borne constant neglect and the worry of a scandal for the last several months

—seemed to assail him, for the first time, with silent reproach.

It was impossible to eat anything, or even to meet the eyes of the tidy maid-servant, who knew of the scandal, and who was as jealous as a lover of any fancied neglect to her mistress. His own sense of rectitude had hitherto enabled him to feel contemptuous and indifferent to the people who were ready to imagine evil of him. A certain obstinacy and defiance would have made him ready to dismiss faithful Martha on the spot had she dared to look at him in such a way only the day before. But now he shrank from the eloquent, innocent eyes of his own children, which seemed to ask him with mute inquiry to account to them for the absence of their mother. The little ones were crying, and refusing to eat their dinner without her.

Evening came, and Godwyn did not appear; night, and they were unable to find her. He knew that others were in dreadful uncertainty about her, the more so when they remembered her delicate health, and were aware that any agitation might be dangerous for her just now. He had unlocked the drawer in which she kept her papers, and had found the anonymous letter which she had put away, hoping to be able to show it to him in triumph, disproving its accusation. Had it come from a bold assailant she might have disproved it easily, but from this insidious enemy, who had laid her schemes so artfully that even he—who prided himself a little vainly on an instinct for reading character—had mistaken a malignant and hypocritical for a mere childish and Will-o'-the-wisp nature,

what hope could unsuspecting Godwyn have had of proving her equal ?

He himself began to feel hope deserting him, and to be more than doubtful whether Godwyn's heart would ever return to him now.

A sense of aloofness came over him, a feeling for the first time as if his wife had been hard upon him. She was one of those good women, he said bitterly to himself, to whom, if they had made up their minds definitely on any given subject, one might appeal with as little result as to the deaf ears of one already dead. Confusion seemed to have fallen upon his home and everything connected with it, as if the trail of the serpent were over his former happiness. "It was as I feared. She was jealous! Her jealousy made her suspicious, and a wicked woman knew how to work suc-

cessfully upon that jealousy," he thought, grinding his teeth with new indignation at the idea. "How can it be possible for us ever to be happy together again when—however stainless she may be herself—she thinks it possible for me to be a traitor? If she had one grain of mercy for me she would have asked me to explain! She was always just, but not always merciful," he thought, with a new sort of austerity, a new remembrance of what was due to himself and his own dignity as the father of his children, when on the next day the news was brought to him that Carslake's wife had found Godwyn.

So she had simply fled away from her husband believing the blackest things against him. He had been as firm as his uncle had been in disclaiming from the first the bare idea that under any

prepossession his wife could have committed suicide. He had not been alarmed, but simply disdainful, when they suggested the searching of every pond and every ditch in the neighbourhood. No such horrible thought had occurred to him; Godwyn was too saintly for such a form of madness.

And yet, when the circumstances of her flight came to be examined, it appeared that she had braved death rather than remain for another hour in his presence !

He did not hear that she had been delirious, nor that the delirium had been succeeded by a long period of unconsciousness ; he never heard this till afterwards. But when his instinct had been to hurry after her and to bring her back again as soon as she could be moved by easy stages to her own home,



the doctor had discouraged any such idea, writing to him in cold and rather formal language, and telling him that the worst thing he possibly could do was to insist on seeing his wife.

“You will simply kill her if you see her; she is unable to bear the least excitement,” the rough parish doctor, who was not used to mincing his orders, had written in terms of sharp decision.

It was the final blow for Humphrey, and with a sense of outraged pride he took, as it were, his resolution in both hands. There seemed to be but one way out of the difficulty, and that was to efface *himself*. He had been misunderstood, the feeling in the neighbourhood was strong against him, and even the men whom he employed looked at him,

as he fancied, with looks of hatred. The knowledge that the widow had left Dornton bag and baggage—and a good riddance too, as the common people said—had done a little to conciliate them; but it was as he had said—they almost worshipped their benefactress. Even this country apothecary had taken part against him, he reflected a little bitterly; there was no more hope of happiness under present circumstances.

He had long talked of paying a visit to America for the sake of inspecting some machinery, and he thought in his desperation of making the present an opportunity for paying it. The profits on which his income depended were not likely to suffer at all seriously by his absence. He had a manager on whom he could depend, and old Mr.

Bardsley, who had become rambling in his talk, and almost childish since Godwyn left, would probably rally if he went. He had always idolized Godwyn, and it was owing to her careful attention that he had aged less than might have been expected, and was still, before this shock, at seventy years of age, almost as clear-headed as he had been at sixty.

It was Humphrey himself who had remodelled everything, and it was owing to Humphrey's careful arrangements that everything worked easily now as if on well-oiled wheels. But in his present mood he was not likely to remember this.

"Few men would be less missed. My wife will make an admirable queen regent. From the first it was *her* influence which kept the fellows steady when *I* was only

a detrimental! God help me to bear it!" he added mentally, as he looked round him and saw the smoke of the cottages ascending to the clear sky on a lovely morning in August when he had determined to take his departure. "When Godwyn misses me she may be sorry; but somehow or other I must set this scandal at rest. It will be impossible for us to go on living together as things are at present!"

He thought of their early married life when he had felt as if in Paradise, and of the happy afternoons that they had spent in each other's company before he had wearied of the sweet contentment, when he had read to his wife from her favourite poets stretched on the green-sward beneath the trees of the wood, or on the golden-brown sand by the malachite sea. Never had Dornton looked

so beautiful, or his little girls more pretty, the youngest of whom—with her mother's hazel eyes and hair like floss silk—clambered upon his knee, and, pillowing her head on his shoulder, began to ply him with prattling questions about her baby brother.

He felt as if life would be desperately void and wretched without these little ones, and yet that, if he went away, it might help Godwyn's recovery. He determined to entrust this letter to Mrs. Carslake, to be given to his wife when she should be well enough to read it and take in the sense of its contents, by which time he had planned to be out of the country. But when Keziah came to take the message, dropping him a curtsey as usual, he had to be silent for some minutes, evidently attempting to

master himself, before he could speak.

To Mr. Bardsley he told no more than that he expected to be absent for a day or two, but to the man who worked under him as in part manager of the mills he admitted that he was meditating of a longer absence; and in his sore need of a trustworthy friend in his great emergency his mind reverted to Captain Newland, and he determined to make him, if possible, his wife's trustee. Humphrey had always had a vague suspicion that Charlie Newland had continued in solitary bachelor-hood when he returned from India because he had been balked in a long-cherished hope of being able some day to marry Ellen Payton's daughter. And he had written to the man who had offended him at Dornton in a sudden burst of confidence which greatly surprised the benevolent captain,

as the letter was handed to him when he was sitting over his newspaper at his club.

“Take care of my wife in my absence,” Humphrey implored in the letter. “Look to her money affairs a little, and I shall be immensely grateful. I do not know how long it may be necessary for me to be away from her, but I cannot return to Dornton till perfect trust is restored between us. I do not intend to be idle in my absence, but I have some idea of crossing the Atlantic to borrow a few wrinkles from our Transatlantic neighbours, which may be valuable to me in my business. I have always had a fancy for the Americans. Though scarcely more than a century has passed away since the States separated from us, it pleases me to think that all traces of animosity have gone, and

we are entering on a new era of mutual sympathy and support."

The bravado of diverging into a new and indifferent subject, and of attempting to moralise about America, as if matters were not so desperate with himself did not deceive Newland.

There was no address on the letter, and yet before many hours had passed the energetic captain had inquired for Humphrey Bardsley at all the principal hotels in London, and had found him at last making the final preparations for his journey.



## CHAPTER X.

HUMPHREY had had no idea of hiding from his friends. In his state of utter depression it had never occurred to him that Newland, who had parted from him in umbrage, would be likely to be anxious about him or to seek him out.

The captain was startled to see how a few days and nights of suffering had aged the young man, making his eyes look sunken, with black circles round them, and his complexion of that

ashen pallor which Olive had remarked.

"If *I* had anything to do with this sudden resolve of yours I hope you will forgive me," he said, holding out his hand. "I wished to save you the pain of hearing many haphazard remarks and much flippant conversation which would almost have maddened you. Then one look at your wife's suffering face made me guess that things were going wrong between you, and—and—you know the rest. I am afraid I made a mess of things in my hope to set them right."

"Forgive you! I only wish I had taken your advice," answered Humphrey, as he grasped his hand, much moved.

The two men sat down, and for some moments there was silence.

Newland was the first to break it.

"Has she had a relapse?" he asked; "your letter gave me to understand that she was—going on—pretty well."

"No, there has been no relapse, but she might have one, the doctor tells me, if I were to return to her."

"A fig for the doctor's humbug! He must be an old bachelor like myself. My dear fellow, here is a comfortable sort of muddle. Your wife frets herself almost to death because she loves you and believes that you have ceased to care for her, and you think to mend matters by running away from her—in other words, by committing a sort of moral suicide."

Humphrey endeavoured to stammer

out an explanation. But it is one thing to see things ourselves through the medium of a distorted fancy, and quite another to make an outsider see them in the same light, especially if the outsider be gifted with a fair share of common sense. To Humphrey it was perfectly clear, in his present state of indignation, that nothing remained for him but to cut the Gordian knot himself. *He* would take the initiative, instead of leaving it to his wife. When *he* was gone, he tried to persuade himself, Godwyn would learn to value him once more. It required no intimate knowledge of a woman's heart to make him certain that if he effaced himself she would long for his return.

Captain Newland listened doubtfully. "Why," he thought, "should his friend talk of leaving England when there was

nothing in the world to prevent him from being restored to his simple domestic affections and natural duties?"

"My good fellow, this is maudlin," he remonstrated when he began to have a faint idea of the argument. "Do let us look realities in the face. Your wife was unstrung! If she had not been ill she would never have doubted you; and she can hardly be held responsible for the fancies caused by a chain of circumstances so calculated to mislead her when she was in a state of bodily depression. Excuse me, but *you* also are over-done and morbid—just in the humour when most of us magnify our venial sins beyond our actual demerits."

Humphrey shook his head, and Newland continued,

"Who is to arrange all this miserable

business but *you*? And yet you talk like a coward of going away. Do you not think your untarnished reputation is precious to your wife?"

Humphrey got up and walked to the window, turning his back upon his resolute assailant.

"If you saw the faces of the honest men I employ, and saw how they look askance at me," he answered, speaking chokily after a moment's pause, "you would know it is too late to ask me that question. For *their* sakes I go away!"

"Heaven forbid! Commend me to a man in a morbid mood for inventing scruples which in a healthier state he would treat with raillery!"

"It is the truth—the miserable truth!"

"It is a temptation of the Devil,"

said Newland angrily, racking his brain to devise some plan for help.

There was another pause, during which the Captain gnawed in vain at his moustache, and then he asked suddenly,

"Where is that wretched creature gone?"

"To the—why do you ask me?—where she came from, I suppose, the Evil One you just mention. How can I help cursing that woman and her wiles?"

"Hush! think of your wife."

"I *do* think; but that woman has brought destruction and misery on us both."

"Hush! Godwyn would not like to hear us talk like this. Besides, it is mere wild nonsense. If the mischief-maker has gone, so much the better for

every-body, otherwise I would have advised you to keep up no acquaintance with her. I could see through Madame von Hannenberg during the short time I was at Dornton. You were both of you too confiding. Reason goes for nothing with women of her stamp. It is always self or else sentiment and romance, and latterly romance had grown wicked."

Again Humphrey executed what the Captain mentally called his "flank movement" of rising up suddenly and going to the window to avert his face. But Charlie Newland continued, nothing daunted,

"So the upas-tres has been dug up by the roots, and yet you persist in deserting your Eden. Let me entreat you to give the matter a little healthy consideration. Why should a wicked meddler have power to mar such lives



as yours and Godwyn's? If any influence of mine could keep you from perpetrating this act of folly——" he added, breaking off in his speech.

Humphrey replied in a stifled voice, passing his hand over his brow, "You don't understand; I only wished to gain time. I don't feel quite as if I can face things in their present tangled state. My own people have turned against me; a little while and all may be right."

"A little while and it may be too late. My dear fellow, if you belong to my profession I have no doubt you would be as brave as any of us in seeking the bubble reputation 'at the cannon's mouth.' I have seen your courage tested and know you to be of the right metal, but to hesitate in a case like this to is fail in moral bravery.

Would it not be well that the past should be forgotten when it cannot be retrieved ?”

“It is not *my* fault,” murmured Humphrey in a softened voice, “if happiness as well as unhappiness has left its indelible marks upon me. No; the past can never be wiped out; but——”

He was making up his mind to let Newland triumph at the risk of appearing small himself, and at any rate to relent in that matter of withholding his address from Godwyn.

But the fates were against him. For even while he hesitated a messenger knocked at the door.

The telegram came from the present manager, who knew that the master had not yet left England; and if Humphrey had been ashy pale before, the hot

blood now coursed over his face as he read it, for it told him that the dreaded relapse had come, and his wife's life was again in danger. He handed it in silence to Captain Newland.

"Go back to her," said that true friend; "whatever happens you must go back to her now."

"When the sight of me might kill her," muttered the unhappy man, "you would have me take that dreadful responsibility!"

## CHAPTER XI.

“I HAVE a good mind to wash my hands of the case. The poor woman herself may have gone through enough to drive her mad, but her friends were equally out of their minds to let her undertake that imprudent drive,” scolded the physician, who had been summoned from Knaresbury by Godwyn’s frightened attendants, who tried in vain to appease his wrath by letting him understand that their only hope of calming Mrs. Bardsley’s excitement had been in yielding to her constantly-repeated

entreaties to take her at any risk back to Dornton.

Dr. West had a great reputation in that part of the country. People who did not understand him contented themselves by saying vaguely that he was "a character." He was tall and thin, with something of the agility of youth, and a plain face, the irregular lines of which were redeemed by the splendid development of the forehead, and, if his manners were somewhat imperious, his heart was warm. He cherished few illusions, and had become conversant during a long practice with the evil side of human nature. But, as he said of himself, he loved humanity for its very weaknesses, and philanthropy founded on such a basis was not likely to be shaken. He was generous and sympathetic if somewhat sharp-spoken,

and he had sometimes been successful in cases in which his brother-physicians had failed, simply because in treating the ailments of the body he had not disdained the sickness of the spirit. If he was not more learned he had sometimes more intuition, and prided himself on being able to divine a secret trouble when a patient was trying to hide it from him. His prejudices inclined him to take the part of the oppressed, and the most vehement advocates of "Women's Rights" could not have told more painful tales than he could of the bodily suffering caused by mental grief to delicate and disappointed women.

"Another specimen of the delightful conduct of our selfish sex," he had muttered to himself, as he repeated the order which had already been given. "Keep the husband away at all risks; the

mere sight of him at the present crisis might be fatal."

He had heard but a garbled statement of the tale. But he was unconsciously steeled against the husband by the sight of Godwyn now, when all was burning confusion in her troubled brain, and when it seemed to need more than human skill to calm the poor palpitating heart, which was beating like that of a wounded bird, as it struggles to stretch its weak wings and flutter away somewhere unnoticed to die.

"It seems to be almost cruel to keep the poor thing alive," he had said between his teeth when he came day after day, and the agonies of that delirium still continued. But not the less heartily did he rejoice when Mrs. Bardsley awoke to a dim consciousness

of her state, and he was able to whisper to the anxious attendants, who had been ministering pityingly to her day and night, that there might be a hope of her recovery even yet.

Still they kept her in darkness, and brought no tidings of what was passing in the outer world. Even when the brain was comparatively calm again, and the eyes had lost their restless gaze, the doctor's orders were imperative, and no one anticipated the question which Godwyn feared to ask. No one in the sick-room said a word of the great consternation which had come upon the household at the absence of the master, or of the strange circumstances of his subsequent return. The servants who waited upon their mistress had their hearts full of one subject, but the physician had gravely impressed



upon them the absolute need of avoiding all topics of conversation which might lead to a return of the excitement.

They were very careful not to let her know that when her eyes had been wandering, oblivious of material objects, and when the fever had been so wild in her veins that the familiar faces were blotted out and the familiar voices conveyed no meaning to her ears, she had been living again in the happy bygone years. Always in these delirious wanderings she had called on one name; always she had recurred to the scenes of her childhood, and was wandering with Humphrey on the golden sands by the sea shore, or standing with him on the cliffs by the picturesque cottages. But as soon as the first gleam of intelligence and half-roused attention came

again into her face, she too was on her guard lest she should compromise her husband's dignity, and she never mentioned his name.

"My boy!" she said, after a little interval, during which she put a stress upon herself not to ask the questions which she was yearning to ask—"give me my little boy."

But it was noticed that she never spoke of Humphrey. Her unexpected reticence on this subject, with the unnatural efforts which she made to resume the duties of her everyday life as soon as her physical health seemed to be a little restored, created a barrier of chilling reserve between herself and the friends who were ready to help her, which was perplexing to those who had not the key of this inexplicable apathy. She had her children constantly with her,

and gave directions even in matters connected with the paper-mills with the air of one accustomed to be obeyed, and living amongst her own people in dignified reserve. But in her face was an absent expression, slightly resembling that of a sleepwalker, which became a subject of positive apprehension to her medical attendants, who began to fear lest the power of feeling might in her case have become deadened from its very excess.

They could not guess that, whilst she was confiding in no one, she was simply endeavouring to follow her husband's directions to the letter, and that whilst they were watching her manner narrowly to see if they could detect any warmth of emotion in it, she was actually enduring such keen and constant anguish during that hus-

band's compulsory absence that the burden of living would have been almost intolerable to her had not one ray of hope descended into her aching heart. That hope alone which enabled her to keep up through the long sleepless nights when she could indulge her sorrow with no one to witness it—asking herself the question which so many a sick and ailing one had asked before her, would the morning never come?—was connected in her present weak mental state with Humphrey.

There had been a long interval of partial and merciful oblivion during that last dangerous illness before she awoke to a distinct perception of her own existence, with a dull sensation of being subject to much keen suffering, and of hearing muffled voices and seeing figures and faces about her, with neither memory

nor foresight. But, in that interval, an accident had occurred which had roused—still as if in a dim and indistinct way—the old association of ideas. It was owing, after all, to Humphrey's persistency. For sometimes during the night when she had seemed to be unconscious of all around her, and when the curtains of her bed had been drawn by her watchful attendants he had insisted on forcing himself to the door of her room, under pretence of helping the nurses, and had stood without, a fire of impatience and restlessness raging in his heart. Then he listened to his wife's laboured breathing, and pictured her as she lay with her sweet lips parched and parted, and the upper and lower lashes wedded over the hazel eyes which might never brighten again at his approach, but which once he had been wont to liken

to the soft dark eyes of the roe. Through all the days when he had known her it had never seemed as if she had been so much all and all to him as she was then. And when more than once her breath came quicker with a murmured cry of pain, it was not the restraints and conventionalities of our matter-of-fact nineteenth century which kept him from falling on his knees by the bedside and kissing the pale thin hand with the cry of "Oh, Godwyn, my beloved!" it was only the cruel remembrance of the medical man's warning that if he were to look in upon her he might cause her death.

As it was he had to stand without, and not to let his great anxiety overcome him; he had to conquer the passionate impulse which made him feel as if—were it not for the presence of

bystanders—he could beat his head in blind anguish against the panels of the door. He could do nothing but question the nurses from time to time, “Is she better?”

And though that question was very carefully uttered, once at least it had seemed to startle Godwyn from the realms of sleep.

“Who was that?” she asked one of her nurses with weak and whispered words, but with an anxious and eager face, trying with some difficulty and a distressing sense of incapacity to piece together the broken fragments of her ideas. “I thought that somebody spoke, but I suppose it was only a dream.”

She turned again on her pillow, when the nurse was afraid to answer. But the chord of memory had been touched in the right place.

"I have had a beautiful dream," she said to the physician with a faint smile the next morning. "My dream has made me feel—oh, so much better."

And long did that dream stay to cheer her in the darkened room, making her feel—she scarcely knew how or why—as if her sentence were not yet told, and as if some good must yet come to all her anxious yearning.

"It was only a dream," she would say to herself when, still cramped with pain, and listening to the tedious striking of the clocks during the dull hours of the long sleepless nights, she turned her feverish aching head. "It was but a dream, but I dreamt that he loved me still, and that he said he was coming back."

And the dream seemed to keep her



up with a consciousness of returning strength.

Dr. West was baffled in his divination, and was as slow in guessing her secret as the village doctor had been before him.

It is one thing to attempt to fathom the inmost mysteries of the soul, which no divination can measure, to calm oneself to make the passions and feelings of our fellow-creatures a study as they react upon the wonderful mechanism of the body, and another to succeed in this occult science. The doctor could only do his best.

“Leave her alone—at least for the present, till her mind has recovered a little of its former tone—she is better as she is,” he had repeated to the anxious and conscience-stricken man who had been hovering about with such

wild eyes and haggard face when that battle between life and death went on in the darkened room.

Humphrey had no more thought of leaving England or even the neighbourhood of Dornton, having long ago recognised the impossibility of living without Godwyn. He had meant to be very firm, leaving her to herself for a time when he wrote her the letter which had caused her dangerous relapse, but now that he looked back upon it his firmness already bore an uncomfortable likeness to obstinacy.

He kept away now only in obedience to the dictates of prudence, as he was told to do. But one face was continually haunting him in his solitary lodgings—one voice, first in a mere whisper and then in a fuller sound, seemed to be borne to him on the breezes. He

hungered to hear it when he was told that the ravings of delirium were over, and that the indescribable gentleness had again crept into that voice which used to be so sweet and low—"an excellent thing in woman."

He could scarcely control his anger when the dictum which he thought so hard was repeated to him, "You may only retard her progress if you attempt to see her too soon."

It seemed like having to be content with the veriest husks instead of his natural bread—to have to listen in pretended patience whilst Keziah described to him how the heart-broken look had passed away from Godwyn's face as she murmured inarticulate rejoicings over the child in which her eyes had already traced—unknown to them—some remote

likeness which no one else would have noticed to its absent father.

“What can the child be to her in comparison with me? Is it possible that she does not forgive? she was never unforgiving,” his heart had cried in sharp jealousy as the faithful woman, who had taken for a time the place of nurse, went on to describe how Mrs. Bardsley could talk at last calmly, and even gently and steadily, on most indifferent subjects, but that whether she remembered—whether she understood all that had happened to her before her illness—were questions which the doctors asked each other beneath their breath.

There were days when Humphrey's enforced absence seemed a trial harder to him than he could bear.

“Did she know how sorely stricken

was his own heart?" he would ask himself. "Could she not guess, by an instinctive sympathy, how near he was to her, and what a passionate yearning he had to see her?" He had tried to imagine how her illness might have altered her, and could not conjure up any vision of what might have been effected by the change. The doctors might be right, but the longing to see her became intolerable.

He never even thought of the other strange creature into whose wiles he had fallen, as he told himself, "like a green-horn," because she had so bewildered and puzzled him; all his dreams, sleeping and waking, were of his sensitive, thoughtful, and gentle-eyed wife, who walked so gracefully and smiled so sweetly—the gracious and noble companion of his life.

What right had he had to such companionship, he who had proved himself to be so weak, so undignified, in his own life?

He could remember now, when it seemed to be too late, how trustful and confiding she had formerly been; and latterly, when she was so sorely tried, her grave, gentle, and forbearing air. He could remember the nutbrown hair, the fingers beautifully modelled, and even the gentle attraction of her graceful carriage in the plain close-fitting dress which she had chosen to wear since there had been an increasing drain for household expenses on their slender purse, and how the plain dress had seemed to suit the shapely curves of her figure. Was it possible that he ever could have undervalued her, and that he could have left so much wearying work, so much thought

about ways and means, to fall so heavily upon her?

He instinctively *knew* that the doctors were wrong, and yet he could not act in direct defiance to their expressed opinion. He had known that the *rôle* of most men during serious illness was often an inglorious and a comparatively useless one. But in his case such uselessness had been aggravated by reflections which were particularly painful. He had been treated not only as if his presence were useless and his sympathy no support, but as if he himself were a source of positive danger to the patient; an extra cause of grief and suffering. Surely, now that she was better this nonsense need not continue. If he could *only see her and speak to her* he felt sure the misunderstanding could easily be set right. He grew sick at heart as

he was tortured by the all-consuming wish.

One day he tried to write to her, but he tore the letter up and feared to send it.

"Wait till she mentions the subject; wait till she asks for you, or for letters from you," they said. "The memory, which seems to have been weakened, will come back, but you must give it time—these things have happened before when there has been a great mental shock."

And so he *did* try to wait, with all the gladness gone out of his face, and growing sick at heart as he was tortured by the all-consuming wish.

"Would not anything be better than for me to be kept uselessly fretting at home? I am hungering to see her! My life is so lonely without her. If she



is really happier without me. I shall put the seas between us and bid adieu to my past existence," he had written passionately to Newland, when the torture became greater than he could bear.

"How much more terrible it would have been for you if that unfortunate occurrence had killed her!" wrote Charlie, a little more sternly as this querulous impatience increased. "You would have been more lonely then. I have heard from Dr. West, and I can tell you he has feared, and fears still, if there should be any sudden excitement, *for her reason*. There is nothing for you but patience, and as to your '*past existence*,' you are talking like a madman. Your lives are *not* past, your love is not past; I trust you have still to reap its richest harvest. We can few of us," continued the un-

selfish writer, "learn wisdom except by suffering; and I, who honour both you and your wife, believe that this experience may be for the best. I look forward to a time, not far distant, when your love for each other may rest on a deeper and richer basis, a new consecration, ripened by the rains—ay, and the very storms of life."

The letter had cost its writer a final effort at self-denial, for it was true, as Humphrey had surmised, that Charlie Newland had returned from India with the hope of making Godwyn Payton his wife, and true also that his disappointment had doomed him to perpetual solitude. For Godwyn's extraordinary likeness to the photograph of her mother, which the young man, with strange constancy to the ideal of his boyhood, had carried in his pocket for years, till, like

the picture in Adelaide Procter's poem,

"It had dwelt with him and listened  
To the secrets of his heart,"

had so still further endeared her to him, that—after dreaming through the long interval of all the happiness he meant to shower upon the little desolate, lonely child—he could never bring himself to seek another wife. The reality had faded back into the dream at last, and the picture had been locked up amongst other relics in a drawer.

But if the letter had proved a little difficult to write, it had more than accomplished its purpose in bringing the moisture to the eyes of the man who read it, and making him feel as if he comprehended for the first time the meaning of the mystery of pain, and how the God-Man had come into the

world to teach His followers that a path to bliss might be won, not only through suffering but through humiliation.

“And he who ought to have hated me for winning her according to all human reckoning, and making her so wretched, can write like *this*,” he muttered to himself as he set out for his evening walk. The night was dark, but Humphrey was not aware of its darkness as he dashed away with a feeling of shame the salt drops which were so strange and unfamiliar to his eyes, but which were blinding him to the aspects of the moonless sky.

Hitherto he had been hot-tempered as well as proud in his trouble, and as he had paced up and down, in and out of the lonely woods, or the more deserted cliff walks, where no one could point at him, he had been ready to curse the

day when he had first seen Olive Neale, and fallen, as she supposed, a victim to her charms, and in that state of bitter feeling his faith in womanhood had been crushed and annihilated, as if the most sacred things must be sacrificed to false and heartless coquetry. His wife alone had remained an exception to him, but the recollection of her sweet, shy confessions of her innocent love, now that he feared he might never hear them from her lips again, and that his heart was sore at her doubt of him, only added fuel to the hidden flame which seemed to be consuming him and well-nigh driving him mad.

But by degrees it was as if a weight had dropped from his neck, like the albatross that fell like lead into the depths of the sea and freed the wearied neck of the Ancient Mariner. The

desperation had gone out of his heart, and at the "selfsame moment he could pray." His soul had been dwelling in darkness. His trouble had been of that kind that he could not say of it, "It is God's will, and therefore it is bearable." Hitherto he had felt as if—had there been anything possible for him to do—he could have gripped with his misfortune till it lay impotent at his feet. He had recognised the breathless abstraction which men call "right," but only as if he could shake his chained hands at Heaven and rave against relentless Fate. A new and mysterious light seemed now to be breaking in upon him. It was one of those crises in the history of the soul which no psychologist if he is wise will treat with flippancy. The deep awe which overwhelmed him—the new "way of looking at things" which

made him understand for the first time in his life, through the mist of ages, how it was possible for The Christ to die if by His death He might procure for man the power of imitating His spotless life, made the solemn sounds and sights of the autumn evening affect him as they had never affected him before. He wandered out on the cliff, listening to the thunderous tide which was booming on the sharp-ledged rocks, and the long lines of black seaweed, which were being lifted and washed away as the waves advanced, till the stars were peeping out near the horizon.

What his thoughts were no man knew, but his face, which had already lost its vacillating pleasure-loving expression, became somewhat less mournful as he determined to do his duty and trust results. After that he complained no

more. He knew that he had to "dree his weird," even in the averted looks of his own men and the cruel misconstruction of more educated people. But these things were all of minor importance. He felt sure that they would dwindle into complete insignificance if once he could feast his eyes on the wife who was now valued as she had never been valued before.



## CHAPTER XII.

HOW much did his patient remember of the past? and when would she give him just so much of her confidence that he might be able to judge whether she could stand the shock of surprise which might naturally be caused to her by the unexpected information that her husband was still in England?

These were questions which Dr. West asked himself in vain, when, as the autumn days went on, Mrs. Bardsley seemed to be less and less able to attend to

the affairs of her household and grew gradually weaker.

It was some time now since he had tried to cheer her in that quasi-paternal manner which had so often helped him in former emergencies, saying, half banteringly,

"A little patience, and a good deal of reason—especially what they call common sense—the most uncommon of all senses—are the only drugs you need now."

She had answered with a feeble smile, but she grew no better. The energy which she had shown for a while was already exhausted, and now her malady seemed to be as difficult to deal with as despair itself. It was only, as he said, a general weakness, a want of courage to meet the difficulty of living.

"Take care of her, and bring the

children to amuse her as much as possible," he said to the anxious servants. But not the less did he acknowledge to himself that, though there were some women who could be strong enough to meet their grief face to face and conquer it, and though Mrs. Bardsley, judging from all accounts, had once been of the number of these women, yet in other cases grief could kill—not by sudden attacks, as in romances or in theatres, but by undermining the vital forces little by little. There was such a thing as prostration, as a gradual and fatal wasting caused by the daily and nightly haunting of a fixed idea, and of this he was afraid. He would rather humour forgetfulness and protect Mrs. Bardsley from what he called "murderous memories."

"Time is the great healer," he re-

peated to himself. "I have known cases in which mere time has built up new interests to replace the most ruined hopes; we must give the poor lady time."

Yet Godwyn did not prove so ductile as he expected. He could not guess that there had been more than one occasion when she had longed to open her heart to the old man who treated her in such a fatherly fashion, saying, "Judge for me, help me, for I am in a great strait," and that on such occasions she had restrained herself with the reflection, "But I am foolish. What I have to suffer I must suffer alone. For Humphrey's sake I must give no third person the opportunity of saying that I have consulted him on what concerns our home."

She had every confidence that another

letter would soon come to tell her of her husband's arrival in America, and would not allow herself to show her secret anxiety at the continued silence as she sat again and again fingering the note which had not only summoned her home at so great a risk, but had filled her with a new sort of self-reproach at the knowledge of her own mistake.

She spoke to no one of her aching sense of shame and soreness of heart, or her bitter recollection of that awkward incident in the past—perhaps all the harder to bear because there was no sense of exaltation in it—with which she came back to everyday life. She was silent, but not the less was she sick with fear lest the faint sunshine of the autumn and the winter days, should pass and her husband remain far away from her. She could not write, for she did not know

his address, and she would have nothing to do with his agent. "Supposing I should die of this weakness," she thought, "die before he returns, and not be able to say good-bye to him. It would be so different from dying if he were near me, and even on my death-bed I should be tortured with the thought that by *my* mistake I had seemed to supply a reason to those who spoke against him, and that it was *I* who had driven him away from me—perhaps for ever."

It was this last reflection which broke down her determined reticence. The brief St. Martin's summer of that October which had seemed so long to her was waning into a misty November, and sickly chrysanthemums had taken the place of the bright geraniums and calceolarias in the small plot of ground which served the villa as a garden, when

she surprised Dr. West during one of his visits by breaking through her accustomed silence. "It is very good of you to come to me so often," she said, "but I think I ought to be able to manage without your assistance now. I am afraid I may never be able to remunerate you properly till my husband returns. I think—it is just possible—that a letter which I expected may have been lost."

It was the first time that she had mentioned her husband's name in his presence, and she met the doctor's eyes steadily, though she was trembling as she did so.

"*I, good!*" retorted the doctor in his fiercest tones to cover her confusion. "Don't talk to me about money. I am simply an epicurean—a voluptuary who satisfies his own taste."

"His taste for doing good? I have

always heard that of you," she answered, trying to smile; "but you know we have never been rich since my husband, partly to please me, offered higher wages to the men—something in the way of pension for their old age—and in *his* absence every thing connected with business is necessarily more or less in confusion."

It was pretty to see her anxiety to make out that everything must be out of order in Humphrey's absence. In reality there was very little that was wrong, except Godwyn's own illness, and the increasing difficulty of comforting the haggard-looking old man, who was growing more childish every day, and began to look very old indeed in his anguish, with a bitterness against his nephew which no one could soothe, and a rage of jealousy for Godwyn's sake



which he was careful not to show in her presence.

"I believe," she continued, speaking with difficulty, "that there were some improvements connected with Mr. Bard-sley's business in America which it was natural for him to wish to investigate; but you know that people gossip, and sometimes they say absurd things, for which there is not the slightest foundation."

She was not generally restless, and could sit still without moving a muscle even in her greatest trouble, but now she was plucking nervously at the covering of the sofa as if she would pluck from her memory "a rooted sorrow."

The doctor was silent; it suited his purpose to draw her out. She fancied that her voice shook and sounded

strange, in spite of her determination to put firmness into it, as she continued, speaking slowly, as if she shrank from the clumsy utterance of words.

“Country places like this are gossiping places. I—I do not know how to explain, but if any one has been to blame for anything it is myself, and not my husband; ever since I have known him he has been the kindest of the kind.”

“You have known each other very long?”

“Ever since our childhood.”

“And he has not kept any secrets from you?”

“If he did it was for my good, and because he was so indulgent to everybody, and did not want to hurt me. My dear, dear husband; it was so cruel of

them to slander him. He made—me—  
for—some years—so very—very happy.  
And oh, the slander would have fallen  
harmless if it had not been for my own  
great—my most culpable weakness!  
Pray, Dr. West, tell every one what  
an affectionate husband he has been  
to me, and how it was I—I who was  
ungrateful and doubted him. If I  
should die, and he return and find  
my place vacant, it would add doubly  
to his misery if cruel stories had got  
about.”

She had forgotten her reserve. The  
slow tears were coursing each other  
unnoticed down her face. Her listener  
was completely taken by surprise. In  
some of his former experiences of women  
he had been accustomed to hear them  
give vent to the bitterest complaints about  
men. When Godwyn first began to speak,

memory recalled to his mind such speeches as,

“Ah, Dr. West, men are always tyrants in their own homes, you know;” or, “It is the men who make the laws, and, we who suffer from them;” or, again, “The poor men beat their wives, and break their bones, but the men of our class break their hearts, which is worse.”

Again and again had his lady patients treated him to such confidences, and it had been decidedly awkward to hear them. But *this* was an entirely new experience. Never a complaint from the meek lips of this stricken one, who had wept till her eyes had lost their lustre, and whose weary, weakened frame had lost its powers of resistance, but whose affections, in spite of her late stimulated indifference, still retained their

former tenacity, and their life-giving warmth.

He began to recognise how this affection must once have made "sunshine in a shady place" for the man who had too hastily thought of his life at Dornton as dull and monotonous in spite of it, but who now was bitterly expiating the fact that his sympathy with such a woman had never been quick and watchful enough, and was at last continually reiterating the prayer,

"Not this cup—not this! God in Heaven, I will leave her—anything—only let her live!"

The quaint old man, who had at first been steeled against Humphrey, now thoroughly pitied him. His heart had bled for him from the time when he had seen him fling himself, unnerved and trembling, into a chair during one of

those nights of anguished suspense when the doctor's face had been significantly anxious, and when Humphrey, wild with fear, had not only made a loyal declaration, but had insisted on watching outside the sick-room, and had cried like a madman.

“Save her—save her!”

That sort of thing, as Dr. West reflected, could not well be acted, and though the fellow, as he said, “might have behaved like a fool,” that very night he had seized his hand in his own silent grasp and implored him to have patience, and all might yet be well. He had seen Humphrey constantly since, and knew how tired and weary he was with the hard battle with himself, exhausted body and soul, or, as the Germans call it, *niedergeschlagen*. Therefore it was with intense pleasure

that he sat down to write to him as follows:—

“I have long been aware that I wronged you in listening so incredulously to what seemed to me to be like a tardy explanation when you first spoke to me, and in thinking of you as a man who was pushed to a confession *in extremis*. You will now be the best doctor for my patient. I think I may report your wife's mental recovery to be complete. She is still weak, and you must be careful not to startle her, but the sooner you make known your whereabouts to her the better.

“She sent for me yesterday, and detained me after my professional visit to consult me, as she said, ‘on business.’ I imagine now that she has been waiting till she regained her self-control before

she questioned me about you. As it was, she consulted me as if you had been the king and she queen-regent to take care of your dignity in your absence. Her countenance had regained much of the firm repose which used to be characteristic of it before her illness, and she never looked less likely to say or do anything in bad taste than when she gave me to understand that it was nothing strange for you to be abroad, and she in ignorance of your exact address, and that she wanted me to help her to keep the Dornton people from 'talking' till you returned."

"Keep them from talking! as if that mattered now!" thought Humphrey, almost laughing when he remembered how jealous he had been but a week before when a speech made by a sour old



maid at Knaresbury, who had always been jealous of Godwyn, had been repeated to him.

“Ah, poor thing! she is brought low enough. What is it that the Scripture says? ‘Those who exalt themselves shall be abased.’ And she was always so praised and made so much of by those ignorant working men !”

As if it mattered what the world said now!—as if *anything* of that kind mattered when God in His merciful goodness had restored them to each other! It seemed as if the time when he had troubled himself about the opinions of other people was very far away in the distance. He had forgotten even how he had felt as if his acquiescence in the doctor's mandate had been very tame and mean,

and as if he were being made a fool of, and ought to assert himself somehow. The poor fellow was in a spirit of charity even with his enemies when he wrote—in a letter in which he thought it wisest to announce his coming—a letter too long and too private for me to quote at its full length,

“Oh, my darling, how could you doubt me or suppose that I could be so mad as to fling my treasures from me? Why have you wearied yourself for nothing? I have been watching by you all the time, counting the hours till I might fly to you.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

“ I AM happier than I deserve to be.

It was too much to expect that he should love me in such a way through it all, and I may never be able to recompense him. Oh, if I had had a little more self-control !” she said with a burst of tears when she received the letter. She did not know how quickly Humphrey himself would follow his note, and it was only human nature if she gave way to another burst of self-reproach at the thought of how she had trifled with her own constitution, and as a

haunting dread came over her that instead of a long life spent in useful work together, and dying, as she had sometimes fondly hoped, within a short time of each other, she might be called upon to take the lonely journey at once alone.

Ah, my friends, if it were possible for us to take that journey together, how often would it be stripped of all its terrors! Let us not be quick to blame the loving lonely soul if, in the hour when its faith is weakest, it seems to shrink from the bitter parting from that which is seen and loved, and stands shivering on the unseen boundary, "facing the darkness and the silence, the absolute strangeness of the mysterious shore! How often lately had Godwyn repeated those words of Mrs. Browning's:—

"O Christ, come tenderly!

By Thy forsaken Sonship in the red  
Drear wine-press—by the wilderness outspread—  
And the lone garden when Thine agony  
Fell bloody from Thy brow—by all of those  
Permitted desolations, comfort mine!  
No earthly friend being near me, interpose  
No deathly angel 'twixt my face and Thine,  
But stoop Thyself to gather my life's rose,  
And smile away my mortal to Divine."

But now let no one blame her if all the motherhood rose up in her, all the wifehood which made it hard to pass from the loving arms which seemed to constrain her to wait a little longer, and if an unspoken prayer came unbidden to her lips as she bade them bring to her her little ones—she had some words to say to them—lest the joy which had come so suddenly that it seemed as if it might threaten the very springs of her weak life might hasten the sudden calling

away, which she, though she had said little about it, had for some time been expecting.

They came into the room hand in hand, the eldest, Christine, with a look of restrained pain and premature womanliness in her small expressive features which was strangely like that of her mother at the same age—Charlie Newland would have recognised the likeness in expression at once—and the youngest—Nellie, after Godwyn's mother—with eyes wide open, and rosy mouth puckered up ready to cry because her mother was ill and looked so unlike what she used to be.

"Christie," she said, drawing the anxious-looking child to herself and speaking very gently, "if God should call me to go away from you, you will take care of dear papa and comfort him,

will you not? If naughty people should say things against your dear father, you will always remember to say that mother loved him, won't you? and that he was very kind to mother, and kind to all of you?"

"Yes," whispered the little girl, hiding her face against Godwyn's shoulder.

"Perhaps God will not take me; perhaps He will let me stay a little longer. But whatever He does, darling, we shall know that He does best," continued the mother, who had counted too much on what had seemed to be lately the marvellous self-control of her daughter.

Christine could bear no more. She had been schooled not to agitate her mother, but for once the child's nature overcame that which had been supplanted and grafted on it. Her

little lips quivered, and her eyes filled with tears.

Godwyn, not noticing, bent down and kissed the child.

"You are the eldest, my pet," she said, "and if I go you may do so much. We must not tell papa yet if God is meaning to let me go. We must trust and wait, and break it to him by degrees."

A cry of great terror came from the child. Self-restraint, so long maintained, broke down. Little Nellie, vaguely understanding that something very terrible was the matter, joined in the sobs. Perhaps it was the best thing that could have happened for the mother.

Her strength revived with the old habit of self-forgetfulness which had been so characteristic of her, and, re-



gretful of her words, she folded the little ones in her arms, hid their heads upon her breast, and clasped them closely to her till the first burst of this unexpected grief should be over. The door stood a little open, and a man who had come up the stairs unheard stood watching the scene unnoticed. Drops of moisture stood on his brow as he watched as if he had been going through some terrible physical trouble, and the heart of the strong man quailed within him as he noticed that the wife who had been so carefully hidden from him was worn to a shadow of her former self.

The higher beauty of the mournfulness which looked out from her pathetic eyes was unmistakable, but he recognised it with a new pang at his heart. He realised as he looked, that though he

might be forgiven, the consequences of the evil might never be taken out of his life—never again could that life be a holiday of unbroken gladness. The father had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth—young as they were—were already set on edge.

It was agony to him to watch that scene, and yet he stood lingering at the door, as he had been accustomed to stand, his whole soul rebelling against what seemed to him the absurdity of the doctor's mandate during the most dangerous time of his wife's illness; but now that the matter rested entirely with himself he feared to advance too suddenly and meet her eyes, lest in that dear gaze—so worn by suffering that the spiritual seemed to have conquered the material—he might en-

counter the lingering remnant of repulsion and horror.

He need not have feared, for that terrible bringing to reason, that last grinding lesson of suffering, had left its marks also upon him, a shadow clear to be seen. He, too, had tasted of a sorrow which would make a heedless man sober, a weak one steady, and purge the dross out of a character, leaving only the gold. There was an earnestness, a depth of feeling in his face which seemed to say that he had found the one thing he wanted, and that in future he would be content with the simple path of everyday life, with no aspirations for a wider or more exciting sphere.

She noticed all this as with one swift glance she raised her eyes and saw the man who was watching her

with that yearning gaze. In one instant of time she had seen that his hair was tinged with white, that his eyes were deep and grave, that his figure was slightly bent, and had lost its look of buoyancy and ease; but that there was an earnestness, a depth of expression in his face which seemed to tell her that Humphrey had found at last that firmness which had been the one thing his character had so much needed. If *she* had suffered, he, too, had been passing through the greatest sorrow of his life, and she had herself partly to blame for it, as she remembered in that moment's glance.

She did not faint or cry out. The presence of the children restrained them both.

"My God, I thank thee!" said God-

wyn softly, her slight frame trembling a little as she sank back in her chair, white as the pillow on which she now generally rested.

She knew that he had come near to her, that he was touching her cheek with his lips, that he almost staggered as his hand clenched the topmost bar of her chair—knew it in a sort of delicious dream, which mercifully did not become a faint—and then heard him saying hoarsely, after the silence of a minute,

“Godwyn, you will never again wish to get away from me, will you?”

The voice was as resistless as ever, though it had lost its old happy, confident ring. She was trembling more and more, and as she listened to its altered tones, still struggling

with that half-unconsciousness, she instinctively covered her eyes with her hands.

“They have tried to keep me away from you,” he said, misunderstanding the involuntary action, “but I knew it was not your doing. I did not think you would have treated me like that. They told me that I was better out of the way,” he added a little bitterly, “and I used to think if I were only out of the world too it would have been no great harm to anybody. But I have listened to them too long, Godwyn. Don’t look away from me; move your hands from your dear face. In your sorrow or in your happiness who ought to be so near to you as I?”

He was white to the lips. He was kneeling by her now.

The sudden surprise had been too much for her. She tried in vain to speak as she moved her hands from her face, but at first the voice would not come. Her eyes sank beneath his impassioned gaze, and as she thought of the happy days when they had been so proud of each other her tears began to fall.

Then it was Humphrey's turn to be patient.

"My child," he said, taking Nellie in his arms and hurrying her out of the room, "your mother is not well, but she will soon be better. You must try to be good and not make a noise."

But of Christine, who stood confronting him with those womanlike eyes, he asked abruptly,

"Do you ever say your prayers in the daytime?"

The child looked astonished, but when he added more gently, "Your mother has taught you to think of these things—go and ask God to help me and let me keep her," she nodded her head gravely, and he was left by himself—left to look at Godwyn as if she were afar off still, fearful of alarming and exciting her, but with an unspeakable longing at his heart.

He threw the window open for a little more air; he could hear her breath come quickly and see her fingers tremble.

"Look up at me," he pleaded. "Would you turn from me, and remind me that I have partly deserved it? And yet—I have never loved any one but you, sweet. Oh, how could you have doubted me? How could you have believed that cruel accusation?"



The blood rushed into her pale face. She caught her breath, and as if by a sudden effort of her will she pushed back the hair from her forehead and looked up with thirsting eyes.

"Humphrey! please don't say such things; don't bring it up now. I never *really* believed it," she answered a little indignantly, "but I—I—think I was half mad. I found it—so difficult—to account—for all—that happened."

"I too felt as if the whole world had turned upside down. You never really believed that I could disgrace you—that there could be any stain upon my name," he said, with the words coming slowly through his tightened lips; "and yet—Godwyn—yet—you left me."

He felt her shiver. It sounded a

little hard on her, but it was less so than it seemed. He had sufficient medical knowledge to see that Godwyn required rousing. He had heard from Dr. West that the days of anxiety, almost hopelessness, to those who loved her were over. But she had been so long facing death—her nervous system had been so unstrung—that she had become morbid and imaginative.

There was a break in her voice as she answered,

“My head was clear only part of the time, and I could not think of the things I wanted to think of. One thing only was clear—that I wanted to help you, though I hardly knew how, and I *did* believe that you had ceased to care for it.”

“I had myself to blame for it,” he muttered.

“I thought,” she continued, trying to

clear herself, "that you did not love me, and that it would be better for you not to be burdened with me any more. I can't tell you quite how I reasoned, for my head got confused, and I began to find it getting dark all round me, and afterwards it was like a kind of nightmare in which I only knew that you felt—you had done unwisely—in marrying me, and that you wished to live—another sort of life from mine. I felt—oh, how can I explain it?—that it would be better for me to go away—than to keep up the poor pretence of attachment between us which did not exist. I felt—just because I loved you so much—so much more than I can express—that there could be no compromise between us—that I *could not* go on living with you sadly and hopelessly with the shadow of what *had* been, and the weary longing for the substance."

"You are sure that you loved me in spite of everything?" he whispered, all the assumed sternness and the last vestige of anger melting from his face, as he saw that his purpose was accomplished, and that she, half-ashamed and half-frightened, had at last found words to express the morbid sorrows which had been poisoning the sources of her life.

"Quite—quite sure."

"And that you have a remnant of that love yet left—still in a corner of your heart?"

"Don't mock me by calling it a remnant. Humphrey, you have been in trouble—partly through my fault—and I never loved you so much as I do now," she said, again breaking down as she looked up into his eyes and remembered how they used to be proud and happy, with no such shadow in them as they had now.

Then, as their eyes met, he caught her to his heart.

"Dear," he said, "if *you* have suffered, don't you suppose that *my* wound has been wide and aching? But let us forget it all; we have still each other."

She almost smiled as she gazed at the brighter expression in his face, leaning her head against him as his arms encircled her. "If you had come before," she said, "I think I should have got better. I tried to get better without you, but I could not. Oh, how I have waited, waited, waited, not knowing when I should hear from you, and if the news would be good or bad—almost fearing to hear the truth—and now—God has been merciful to me—He has restored you to me at last! You talked of going away from me. That crushed me down. I don't think I have

been ever properly alive since that letter. I have seemed to be living in a dream, in which once by accident I heard your voice, but it was generally a bad dream, in which everything around me was altered. Oh, think of it! If I had been a man I could have sought the world for news of you, and if you had been in the world I *must* have found you; but as a woman, and with these little ones, I could only wait," she faltered almost incoherently. "I wish—if it is not wrong to wish it—I could get well and strong again for your sake, Humphrey, but it is right that I should bear the penalty of my own mistake, and—perhaps it is too late."

"No, it is not too late," he said emphatically; "the doctors tell me that if you are happy again you will get quite well, and you must not say these morbid things any more, now that you are no

longer convinced of the worthlessness of the man you loved."

She could not answer, but something told her that she had not lost her hold on life, and that it was a richer and more enduring love which Humphrey would have to give her now—a love which would be no longer variable or capricious, but which would have its roots far down in a more enduring soil.

And when he murmured, "My wife, you should never have doubted me; you were my first love from the time we were boy and girl together!" her thoughts recurred pityingly, as they had often done, to Olive.

She had sometimes pondered lately on that unfortunate woman's history, wondering whether she ever thought with disgust of her own incredible folly. Alas, for poor Olive! must she not have

seemed to wake too late from her dream of passionate hatred, and—feeling her revenge satiated—have longed almost for annihilation in the first moments of her bitter self-recollection? Must it not have seemed to her like an impossibility that she should ever have thought and acted as she had done at Dornton in defiance of all womanly instincts? So Godwyn had pityingly asked herself, measuring the nature of her old acquaintance by her own.

Desdemona, accused of treachery which she loathed with her whole soul, asked in her innocence. "Are there such women?" What did she know? What could such a woman in her simplicity know of the thousands of things around her?

Godwyn did not answer Humphrey's half-reproachful speech. She forbore to



justify herself, but when he added, a little bitterly,

“Ah! you do not believe me! You are thinking still of that wretched complication. You cannot blame me for my weakness more than I blame myself, but I must be allowed to say a word to make you understand——”

“Don’t,” she interrupted with quick correction; “never let us recur to that nonsense again. You used not to be much given to bemoaning past troubles. I shall think it is *my* fault if you, too, have grown morbid.”

And when he added,

“Not *your* fault! You may forgive that woman, but I don’t feel at present as if *I* ever can,” she pressed her finger on his lips, and said,

“You *must* forgive her. That is part of the compact. I believe she must have

suffered more than we did, poor thing! I cannot believe that any woman could have acted as she did without an agony of shame at the recollection."

"I don't think you know anything about it—you don't understand," he began, when she still pressed her hand on his mouth, and continued, pleadingly,

"Some silly freak of hers! She did not mean to go so far. Do you remember, Humphrey, when she was a girl she was often given to girlish freaks, but it was her protecting, careful mother who would never let her get into trouble for it?"

"Ah, charity! always charity! I advise you not to trouble your little inventive brain about it! You have talked already too much for your strength, and I can put an end to all speculation by telling you that when you were lying at the point of death, and about six

weeks after she had pretended she cared for me, she married a rich old man without troubling herself as to whether we died or not."

"Does it matter?" she asked with a happy laugh, the first she had laughed since her illness. He did not laugh in reply. It seemed as if the easy-going smile had for ever left his face; but he said gravely,

"I thought I was a tolerable judge of human nature, but I find I knew nothing at all about it. I hear that she is going to Paris for the winter, and is expected to create quite a *furore*."

"Hush! don't be bitter."

"With plenty of lace, old china, and bric-à-brac."

"It is a good thing she has that safety-valve."

"To comfort her in the hash she has

contrived to make in her own life."

"Don't," she said again; "we must try to shield her; let bygones be bygones."

He smiled for the first time as he sealed the compact, and returned the kiss which his wife had given him.

"Ah, Humphrey, my boy!" cried the old man, who, with one of the quick transitions which characterised his new childishness, had passed at the mere sight of his nephew from the severity with which he thought it right to treat people who were disloyal to family obligations to the easiest possible benevolence, "ah, Humphrey, we have been expecting you to come every day. You went away long ago—ever so long—and Godwyn has been pining for you—so you have come at last."

Mr. Bardsley had heard the familiar voices in the sitting-room where he was

attempting to study as in the days gone by, and had put an end to the last allusion to the mischief-maker, which Humphrey and Godwyn never allowed themselves to make, by hobbling out to meet them, forgetting all his irritation respecting his nephew. His eyebrows, which had lately been contracted into quite a terrible frown, were smooth again.

“What!” he said, after giving a long stare at Humphrey, “we shall have to feed *you* up a bit as well as Godwyn! Wynnie used to make a capital nurse—I never knew a better—but she has been ill—very ill herself. Boy, if she were *my* wife I’d never leave her.”

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